Insight's from The Ordinary

A Therapist's Journey

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Finally, but not last, I want to thank God for all of the gifts I have been given. It is only through his grace that I am able to pen these words.

Mitch Rosenzweig
Portsmouth, NH

Insight on insights

In order for people to change, they have to be motivated. For many, that motivation is enough to get them into my office but insufficient, by itself, to actually create change. Through careful exploration and introspection, we can develop new insights and thoughts that help to reframe our thoughts. Sadly, we can't erase or change our past but we can put it in perspective. Ideally, clients should obtain some sort of insight and understanding from the therapeutic process and be able to use this to motivate future change. But people change reluctantly. I have often quipped to clients that if they could change without my help, they wouldn't be in my office.

Metaphors, analogies, and humor seem to transcend our challenges. We have images and symbols that hold special power in our memories. If we can access these, in a nonthreatening way, we can create new neural thought pathways and behaviors. But this is not easy. Our characters are well defended and protected. We really don't want to change, regardless of what we say. Change is hard and insight is rare.

The book started as a travel blog inspired by one that my daughter kept when she studied abroad. It was just miscellaneous popcorn from daily living. I had lots of readers that vicariously traveled with me through my words and photos. But during this time, I was in the need of healing. Life experiences had presented many dark clouds. As I explored these areas through my writing, readership increased. It seems that through the power of my exposition, they were able to relate to their own personal challenges. When I returned to the States, I basically abandoned the blog since I felt I didn't have much that was entertaining to say. But a quick check of web analytics indicated I was still getting readers. Maybe I did have something to say.

I re-entered the blogosphere, posting a thought every day. Since then, the project has evolved considerably and resulted in this publication. As of this writing, I have had readers from 50 countries and 47 states. This has all come about through the power of social media as the blog cross-posts on Facebook. Dozens of readers have indicated that they are able to walk side-by-side with me as I describe a situation that they can easily relate to. Many indicate that they have benefited from my words and urged this publication.

Although this book may not reach the best seller list, if it helps a few people think differently about their challenges, it will have achieved its goal. Thanks for reading!

Mitch Rosenzweig, MSW

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Something to say... nothing to say

Did you ever hear the old joke about stopping to think and forgetting to start again? I really wonder if that's possible. It seems to me that when I stop to think I get lost in thought. Sometimes it's a maze in there!

But my thoughts recently are about happiness. In thinking (see the smoke coming out of my ears like the Tin Man?), I wonder if happiness can be defined best by a lack of unhappiness? Kind of a weird thought, but really... aren't we all just trying to avoid being unhappy? We seem to have daily task lists and personal goals that we define as being required to be happy. If only we can accomplish... we'll be "there."

Yet if we look at people, I wonder how much of their time they just feel happy? In a place where they feel self-assured, restful, and at peace. We chase this through all kinds of things like yoga, meditation, etc. We travel to exotic places looking for that sense of "ahhh." Yet even when we find it, it is really fleeting isn't it? I think Maslow was right that we are always striving for self-actualization but few, if any, achieve it. So we go through our days chasing the list of what needs to get done, our personal goals... and yet that state of happiness always seems a bit out of our reach. Most of us don't even think about being happy but we sure know when we are unhappy right? So is happy the absence of unhappy?

I hope when you stop to think, you remember to start thinking again.

Baggage

Recently I was preparing for a week-long conference out of town. I had much internal debate about what suitcase I should bring. A week is a long time and I needed both professional and casual clothes. Of course, I had to consider airports and the dreaded security indignities, how to get to and from the airport, and lugging the damn things. I carefully thought out what I thought I needed to bring and ended up thinking that I needed to bring my behemoth-sized case. Shoes are the worst but we need them for walking around. So, just 3 pair... no wait..... 4. That is, until I revisited the lug-ability. So then I decided on 2, no wait, 3 smaller bags. But I could just use the big one.... Then I had to check and pay the fees... and the pondering continued...

We all have baggage in life. Our past experiences, wishes, pain, all get stuffed into our baggage. Sometimes we can control what goes in... and other times we can't. Some of us have the mega bags and stuff every thought and memory in them. They suffer in lugging the bag around as they make transitions from one place to another. Others always travel with an impossibly small carry-on and just "wing it" for their needs and recycle outfits. As parents, we help our children pack their bags to have all the tools they need to face life's uncertainties - and hope that they have everything they need for their journey. Seems we're always pondering if we helped them pack the right things.

Is there a right size bag? Resilience teaches us to travel light and just roll with it. No matter what we face, we can improvise to meet the challenges presented. And we do, until we have to scramble to get something we don't have at the local market.

As a therapist, I ask people to show me their bag. We help to root around in it to rearrange their probably too big bag to make sure they have what they need. Sometimes, we even carry their bag for them at our own peril - oh my aching back! In fact, we have to approach them without our baggage in order to be sure we don't unduly influence them. Our bags are left to ourselves on the baggage carousel until we are able to reclaim them at the end of the flight.

As I ponder my travels for the past few years I can't help but wonder, do I have too many bags? Am I just an overnighter, or a Skycap-sized load? It seems people keep trying to give me their bags and I dutifully try and carry them. And the burden can be great. Yet those day travelers without suitcases seem to be either dim-witted and ill-prepared.... or perhaps just lucky.

All true relationships have baggage. It's what prepares us for our journeys. But the question remains, how much should you bring? At the end of the day, I decided to bring my inspector gadget backpack, a medium carry-on with essentials and I checked the damn shoes. Was it the right decision? I made it back and wasn't naked on the trip. Guess it was enough... for that trip. I wonder what I will need on my next trip.

Off to the luggage store.

The brightest

It was a lazy day. The sky was brilliant blue with just a zip of sweatshirt breeze dancing in the trees. I stretched out on my sleep-inducing sofa and was cozily reading a good book. The images emerged and the time flew away. With a start, I woke up in darkness. It was chilly on this fall eve. Glancing out the window, stars charmingly twinkled. I tried to focus on the brightest but each seemed to fade and its neighbor glimmered brighter. A few constellations emerged from the darkness as I recognized the night sky. Lost in melancholy again, thoughts of what was and what may be flooded my foggy consciousness. Transfixed I pondered in a swirl. Where had the time gone? It had been a beautiful fall day and now it was lost to the darkness.

The night is full of wonders but there is much dark between the twinkles. Like life, there are many bright spots that we cherish. Romance, love and accomplishments each give us light. But the space between can be pitch black. The twinkles fade as we look back over our thoughts, falling into patches of dark. The stars are still there but the gaps are as dark as the stars are bright.

We only miss the Son when it is dark out. But his brightness shines no matter if we focus on it or not. Giving thanks for all we are and what we will be will always chase away the darkness.

Always

It's my third one. I thought this one was going to last. The first one was a hand-me down and I fell in love with it. Then it went kaput without warning. So I bought another one. Really, it wasn't cheap or second-hand even. It lasted for a while but then started acting up. Then phweep, it conked out one day. No reason, just stopped working. I fussed and cussed for a while. I pried it open and stared blankly at the circuit board. Nothing to be done, no mechanical parts. I banged it a few times on the bench, as if that would do anything. I thought, I'll just get another one—third time's the charm. Yesterday, it quit working. Pretty frustrating. It's not like I am rough on them, really they just sit there. Once it's set up, it is just supposed to work. And for the most part they did, until they didn't. I guess I just expected it to keep working. Not so much, I guess. But I goofed around with it a bit and it's working again. For now anyway. Best to start shopping for another radio.

We really expect things to just keep working, 'cause they always have. But life's not like that. Sometimes things just break unexpectedly. For the parts of our life that aren't working well, we kind of expect it. We prepare. But when the parts that seem to be working perfectly well stop, there is shock and frustration. And the more important they are, the frustration can turn to unproductive anger.

But some things just don't last forever anymore. Relationships, jobs, and moments all seem to be more fragile than they should be. We should always appreciate what we have. Aside from the grace of God, nothing really lasts forever.

We really shouldn't take anything for granted, for we never know when things will change.

Faith versus grace

Christians prepare this week to celebrate the beginning of the Lenten season. Although I often quip that I don't go to church because I am afraid of lightning, at my core I am a man of faith and beliefs. I may not be able to casually quote scripture, but my faith is what drives many aspects of my life. Of course we are all imperfect and live in an imperfect world. Christ accepts and forgives our mortal failings and asks us, through our faith, to continually strive to be better people with the promise of eternal salvation. Although I am not sure about eternity, I know that for me, today, it matters more what I do when I stand up than what I say on bended knee. Yet I accept that it is only through grace that I can count the many blessings I have enjoyed in my life.

Lent is a time of preparation, contemplation and sacrifice. My daughter reminded me about the tradition of giving up something of importance to remember Jesus' fasting for 40 days before his death and resurrection. It is a tradition that I have held for many years. Not because I am holier than thou but just as a reminder that sacrifice is important reminder of my faith.

As kids we were admonished to give up candy; a very difficult thing to be sure. As adults, we have many other things that loom like forgotten New Year's resolutions or other vices. This year my list is long.... Cigars, junk food and even alcohol (gasp!) But once again I will also undertake new behaviors to try and find balance: back to the gym... back to church...

Seeking balance through expression of my faith will help me to be a little more deserving of the grace that has been given me.

Pondering my pinkie

Two years ago I was in a bicycle accident. In a typical daydreaming, klutzy move, my front tire got stuck in a groove and over the handlebars I went. Scraped both legs, both elbows, took a divot out of my face, tore up my shoulder and my hand. Now, in typical male fashion, I didn't go to the doctor. In fact I rode home after the wreck looking worse than Woodward Ave. after a February thaw. Pretty much a mess on wheels. After about a week of being tough and enduring more bruises, I wimped out and went to the doc to find I had a broken finger. Casts, wraps, and physical therapy, and my finger has survived.

Last year I had an emotional bike crash. Unexpected and got pretty banged up. In typical machismo fashion, I toughed it out for a few weeks and ended up getting hurt more and more. Finally, I was able to seek solace, after having run like a scared dog from room to room yelping at the scary thunder and lightning. After months of enduring, I have reached a good place. Still, I am fully functional and able to complete most daily tasks without too much discomfort. Does my finger still hurt? Yep. And it's a little crooked too. But perhaps the scar tissue will always remain.

Best to keep both eyes on the road ahead rather than the injuries of the past.

I'd rather be hated

Some days some things just don't make sense. Are some people so fragile that they have to hate in order to feel good about themselves? I am a man of values and of course believe in right and wrong, but really, I have a hard time with "hate." Seems people just casually use the word when they talk about a dislike or something that annoys them. I hate onions or those shoes she's wearing, etc. Of course, vegetables and fashion are just minor examples, some people seem to hate on a much deeper level. It seems part of their character. There was a popular bumper sticker a few years back that said "Mean people suck," and a popular movie with the troubled LiLo called "Mean Girls." We seem to revel in watching other people be mean and then get all wigged out when our kids bully someone. I used to tell my kids when they were young not to even use the word. It's just an extreme expression. Aren't there other ways to express your opinion?

Has anything good ever come from hating someone or something?

Always on

Occupational hazards abound in my world. It seems that as soon as someone finds out what I do, they either have a quick joke about how mentally ill they are, or more likely, a friend. All of a sudden I have superpowers and can read minds, analyze someone's behavior, and damn near walk on water when it's not frozen. If only…

Yet you really can't "turn off" your education or training can you? Constantly in-tune, trying to recall their stories, remember their struggles, and provide a modicum of support. Or perhaps entice them to stop by the office to explore options and resources.

It's just as bad in my personal life. When I meet someone I always get the same assumptions or even the blank stare of "Oh, Crap," and they withdraw. Sometimes I get intellectual curiosity, but most of the time people are initially fearful of the mind-reading thing. I have an old friend who used to never tell anyone that he met what he did, or else said he was a plumber. People admire plumbers but aren't afraid of them.

I do not, nor do I want to, analyze everyone. It's exhausting. I try hard to keep professional boundaries with friends, acquaintances, and family. Of course… you still can't turn it off.

The cost of a smile

What would a day be like without smiles? I can hardly imagine it. A smile is more than a social greeting; it is an expression of everything from joy to sarcasm. But mostly, it just an expression of happiness at something, or more likely, someone. In the grocery store, I noticed that I felt an affinity to those who would smile at me. Had we ever met before? Nah, just strangers passing in the aisle, but after they smiled... well, somehow I felt like it was OK to be a little nicer to them. As opposed to the aisle-blocking, intense shopper that was oblivious to the world.

I bet your day would feel horrible if you didn't receive any smiles. I know when I was working with little kids; I thrived on their smiles and hugs. A simple smile can even make your day... depending on who it's from. Aren't we all addicted to the smiley emoticon? :) I always try to be a little witty to help someone feel just a mite better... just for a millisecond or two.

More than a cursor

Blank screen, dull mind, vacant stare. The power of words from the finger tips. It's interesting the power we give to language. Words can comfort, uplift, or any number of different emotions, though they have no physical properties. Sometime we are articulate and can express ourselves with wit and precision, other times we ramble and stumble foolishly over simple syntax. A few of my constant readers always find my typos and spelling impairments. Yet the fingers move gracelessly over the keyboard trying to unstick thoughts, feelings and aspirations. It's the meaning rather than the spelling.

I wonder about people who can't communicate. How do they even think? On my long drive home the other day I was thinking about "Flowers for Algernon" and Charlie. You may recall the science fiction story about a handicapped young man who, through an operation, obtains the ability to be normal, only to lose the abilities again. His pet mouse, Algernon was the first subject. Not having the ability to express yourself must be very frustrating, to put it mildly. Losing the ability, or never having it, to communicate your thoughts, desires and feelings must be terrible. I can't even imagine. Again, thoughts of the post-World War 1 novel, "Johnny Got his Gun." Depressing.

Yet for many of us, we take this power for granted. We use words as weapons to wield hurt and pain upon others, just because we can. Just because we CAN say something doesn't mean we should. Perhaps one of life's great lessons is knowing when to be quiet. If you can't say something nice....

Today, I am going to try to actively find ways to bring smiles and joy with the simple power of words. It won't cost anything and maybe, for just a moment, someone will feel that warm glow of caring.

The quest for who cares

Although it was sarcastic, someone said to me the other day…"See if I care…" We have all heard it at some time. But really, aren't we all on a quest to find someone that cares? That "See if I care" comment is designed to push someone away or belittle the person saying it. Yet "caring" is probably one of the greatest reasons for falling in love, because "I care." Or more likely, they care. Because if I care and they don't care then really, who cares? Because that's what tragic, unrequited love is right?

Caring can be a fickle thing. Sometimes we care about something… like what's for dinner, and other times we don't. Yet when we really care, it's important that everyone else does too. Advertisers, public radio and various charities all want us to care about what they care about. Make a donation, show you care… Buy our "green" product and show you care.

We all know that our parents care, and our kids care. But really, that's almost an obligatory care. I think that crosses the line from caring into love most times… but even those that are hated by their family, or vice-versa, still care.

I confess, from time to time I look at the personal ads. They are nothing but a quest to find someone that cares. A long list of gottas that you have to have or they won't care. My boss thinks I should care because they pay me… as if anyone really works for money. I really don't care about money, well, not specifically anyway.

I do know one thing, I do care. No, not about the type of shoes I wear or what's for dinner. I care about people… what they do, what makes them

tick, what makes them happy and most of all, I care about how I can help them in the quest to be cared about.

But my quest to be cared about seems to have been life-long. Perhaps that's why I chose my profession. Counter-transference? Or benevolence? Doesn't matter, I am who I am and I am not afraid to say... I care.

The land of "what if....?"

When I was a kid, I lived in the land of "I want to be." Emulating the heroes of the day, I wanted to be a veterinarian, an astronaut, a priest… all lofty goals, but alas none was to be. I was lost in a world of illusions.

As I got older, I crossed into the land of "When I..." When I get out of this stinking school, when I graduate, when I get a job, etc. A land of promise and dreams for sure, but still definitely not in the moment.

Then the car swerved and I ended up in the land of "Now that I..." Married, kids, jobs. A land of rewarding toil. Wasn't a bad place but it lacked inspiration.

Then the damn car ran off the road into the land of "Woulda, coulda, shoulda..." Gee, if self-doubt reigned, I woulda been king of that land for sure. (I still occasionally go to visit, but not sure I live there anymore.)

I am convinced that now, I have crossed into "What if land..." What if this happens or that happens, what if I did this or that? A land of uncertainty.

I wonder when I will get to "I am glad I am here land?"

Expectations

So what do you expect today? It seems we all have some expectations on an ongoing basis. We expect that we will accomplish our daily tasks without much ado, we expect sanity (or zaniness) at the office and a whole host of other things. Where it gets complicated is when we expect something from others; that they will "do" or say something. Crystal ball stuff. And lo and behold, sometimes they don't! Gasp! They didn't act as we expected, and then we go into crisis. Depending on the scenario, it could be a shrug or a trip out to the bar or shopping therapy.

Transactional Analysis talks about unconscious scripts that we follow based on parental or societal expectations. Others have scripts for us as well... how they expect we will act in our life roles. Some believe that there is a divine script, or life plan, for each of us. It is difficult to follow others' scripts, especially if they are unstated. Even when we know what is expected, they still can be a challenge when it goes against what we think. You are expected to be one way but you feel another. I met with a woman who just got married because she was expected to. Seems it may have been a bad choice and now she's struggling.

Of course we have free will and can act anyway we want. But really, how many act outside expectations? It always amazes me when I learn how some secretly act outside of conventional norms. I had a patient tell me the other day that they wear men's underwear and no, she wasn't a man. A whispered secret.

I wonder what things would be like if we tried to act outside of some of the repressive norms and expectations in our life scripts? Would we all end up being like Walter Mitty? Would men wear skirts and women shave their heads? Doubtful...

Take a chance, be yourself and be proud of who you are.

An extra chicken leg

Yep, I confess. I did it. But I felt bad all night about it. A simple extra chicken leg. It was there, talking to me… saying "Eat me, Eat me." I guiltily did. I was punished, and felt bloated all night.

Yet what is this guilt? For Lent, I had given up all sorts of things…. Cigars, junk food, snacks, been doing Atkins and exercising. I gained something like 15 lbs. in the fall with all of the chaos of moving and my mom's passing. I lost interest. Prior to that, I was doing all of the above most of the time! Lost like 40 lbs. in 4 months, exercising, I COULD SEE MY ABS! Then I did a crash and burn. At some point when you begin to stare longingly at the stretch pants and regret your thrift store donations, you make a decision to get back on track.

But how do we create this new normal? The driven, compulsive "Of course I am going to…" "Eat that? No way." Or whatever the new goal is. How different this is from my "Hell yeah, I'll have seconds…" What causes us to find that determination when we need it?

Fear doesn't work as a motivator—look at all the smokers. Rewards obviously influence it but don't appear to be the sole factor. Most of us don't work for money. But we have all done it—reached down somewhere and steeled ourselves for action. Emerged from our slug-like status to accomplish something. Surely that must be the difference between success and failure. Motivation and mindset. Perhaps that all a good therapist does anyway? I know it's more than cheerleading but there is that infamous Gestalt we hope our clients achieve when they "get it." I remember a day a few years back when three patients in a row expressed that "Ah Ha!' only to lose the thought prior to our next meeting.

But it was only an extra chicken leg. I'm over it.

I found it!

Yep, right where I left it four months ago. In my robe pocket. I had given up—searched high and low and nothing. That is until I put my robe on. I can't believe it's been four months since I wore my robe.

Sometimes we all lose things. I suspect keys are the most common, but I suppose it could be anything. It's rare that I lose anything for a long period, but I worry about losing things. I am constantly feeling myself up for my phone, my keys and wallet. I heard a story the other day that a town put up a sign that said beware of pickpockets. As soon as they did this, the incidence of pickpocketing skyrocketed. As soon as people saw they sign, they checked for their valuables, and the thieves knew just where to pick. Interesting paradox.

Other people lose their mind, their way, or their money. Sometimes I get lost. I know I have made some donations to the Casinos. I am pretty sure my mind is still intact but I guess my constant readers may disagree. If it wasn't for my GPS I'd surely end up in strange and faraway places.

But I definitely have lost my way on occasion. Took a wrong turn somewhere on my life path that resulted in long winding roads. Yet the path may have been the journey I needed to take. More paradox? There have been many interesting waysides and people that I met. It always feels amazing when I get back on the "right" path ….and can say, yep, I found it too.

That's not funny

Humor is a weird and personal thing. Although I am sure there are some tips that stand-ups learn, what some people find outrageously funny, others won't even crack a smile at. Although I think of myself as occasionally witty, it is difficult to get me to laugh. A wry smile now and then, but an out and out laugh is rare.

The essence of humor, for many people, revolves around making fun of different people. We have all heard jokes using racial and religious slurs designed to embarrass, belittle, or shame people. Depending on the time, the target is varied, but always designed to make the jokester feel superior. I was flipping through the dial the other day and found a whole channel devoted to just that! It was supposed to be raunchy, raw, and "good fun" at someone's expense. Of course, it's always funny until the target of the joke is something or someone that we care about. Then it's not funny. In some ways, I think that this is what bullying is all about, the need to feel superior.

Yet, if I think about what makes me laugh, I wonder if I am guilty. No, I don't tell racist jokes but I do know a few dumb blonde ones. Or jokes about sex. I have heard more than a few working with the military. Of course, being a guy, bodily functions and noises always seem to bring a grin. But really, laughing at someone else for this is pretty immature. Guys do it all the time. Perhaps girls do, and blame it on the guys' influence.

Of course, there are a million sex jokes about conquests, endowments, and legendary performances. Perhaps that's all wishful thinking. Yet, there were times when my inbox used to fill with them. Please, never forward any of that to me! I have enough time deleting all of the Russian brides and Viagra ads.

All of these seem cheap and easier than a $5 dollar whore. Oops. But it's true. These are the jokes that people can never remember. Passing fancies and a quick grin. A quick Google search will bring you hundreds. Eh, no thanks.

I prefer double entendres, witticisms, and human experience humor: George Carlin, Robin Williams, and Steve Martin were masters.

Stop a minute now, and think about the last time you really laughed.... Did you learn something about yourself?

Working the core

So I survived a second yoga class. Way, way harder than it looks. Take notice fellas, this is *real* exercise. They keep the studio at 85 degrees and the sweat runs off like a waterfall. A good sweat.

Many times during the exercise, the Yogi referred to working your core, or using your core. I was unfamiliar with this as a term until I started working out a few years back. It really refers to your gut and all the muscle, or lack thereof, in your middle section. It is critical for maintaining balance, stability and focus. I could never do that Bosu ball—it annoyed the hell out of me actually. Maybe it's because I'm not coordinated.

Perhaps it has nothing to do with my lack of coordination. Maybe it's my metaphysical core that is seeking balance and stability? We all get a little padding or muffin tops as we get older. Set in our ways, complacent, and poorly focused. Just going through the motions. I am clear that's why I bleed easy—I can get cut on a rubber ball. I'll look down and see drops of blood and think, *Now what did I do…*

Yet, I bleed emotionally easily too. Sometimes the counter-transference with a client is powerful. You feel and experience their emotions. It's cathartic for them but makes me sink into my chair a little further, a little deeper. A terrific burden. As mental health professionals, we strive to keep balance and boundaries. Much like the Warrior Two pose. Strong, invincible, ready to defend and deflect. But on our good days, we still must be empathic.

Perhaps both my physical and emotional cores are a bit flabby? I was in much better shape last summer, with the promise of the fabled new beginning in

New Hampshire. I could see my abs and had some definition! The life space came together quickly. Core illusions faded to cold reality with the loss of my mom, and trepidation returned. A focus, but much, much different.

As I tried not to fall over too many times last night, some of the strength returned. I even got a "good" a few times from the Yogi. So I shake it off, focus on stability and set my gaze point in front of me. The core will get stronger.

Half a billion fantasies

If only... just for a moment… you think. Or more likely, you fantasize about what you would do. Lottery fever is an epidemic. 540 million dollars when I last looked. Of course, they say money can't buy happiness, but we'd all like to try, right? The cynics call it a tax on poor people.

In that brief orgasmic moment where you stand clutching your ticket, you indulge. For most, the first is probably pay off your bills... get rid of that worry which haunts. After that... I suspect there are a million wishes in the naked city. Some have the altruistic imagine of giving a large part away to charity. That is, until they win I'll bet. Others dream of houses on the French Rivera, exotic cars, and other material possessions. The money would disappear rapidly but they would live out their fantasies for a few moments. I read somewhere that most winners end up bankrupt relatively quickly. Wasn't there a reality show about this?

But for many, this is beyond a fantasy. It falls into the hope category. They "need" to win. They pray to win. I remember a scene from the Jim Carey movie, "Bruce Almighty," where the character granted everyone's prayer to win. Everyone won, but got seventeen dollars. One of my old staff members used to give lottery tickets for Christmas. Interesting concept, but I am not sure that's what Jesus would ask us do to celebrate his birthday. We have all heard the statistics about the odds of winning.

My plan, you ask? It probably wouldn't be full of hedonistic pleasures. I would help. Not, put my name on a building kind of help, but help nonetheless. Small gifts to make a difference. Perhaps micro-loans to help struggling families. It's amazing what just a few bucks would do. I would

value anonymity. I'd help my family and extended circle of friends, take care of their needs, not wants. I'd invest, which would make my broker very happy. I'd continue to work but perhaps not for fools. A different lifestyle, but not drastic. No Leer jets to Nova Scotia to see the total eclipse of the sun or anything.

I am sure you all have your plans as you stand in line. I'll probably stand in line too, just for that orgasm. Cheapest thrill you can get for a buck.

The eyes have it

As I looked into her eyes, the story was told. Intrigue, hope, apprehension.... All expressed in a momentary glance...

It's the first thing you notice, or at least I do. Oft described as windows to the soul, your eyes express all that you are. It really doesn't matter their color or shape, your thoughts and emotions are apparent to the observant. You can quickly tell if someone is bored or interested, ecstatically happy or in the depths of depression. It's all there at a glance. If you take time to more than glance, their entire story is there.

Sometimes you catch people's eyes, strangers at best, and as their smile forms you feel affection. I have noticed catching people's eyes while driving lately... Intent and focused. Hopefully if they wave they use all of the fingers when you catch their eyes... Regardless, you sense their purpose. Whether to pass, merge, or beat you at the light.

As I talk to people in my role as a therapist, the visual cues are often the best storyteller. Most often, people think that you only know of them what they tell you verbally. But even the coldest, formal reciters show their thoughts in their eyes.

There is an old saying that love is blind. No way. Love is full, encompassing and definitely expressed through the eyes. You can feel it as the bride looks at her groom, a mom looks at her child or the star-crossed lover dreams. Blind to imperfections, you echo; sure, but it's still there.

Of course in our culture, and many others, it is considered rude to stare, or look into someone's eyes for too long. It is a sign of disrespect or intrusion.

As if you will see all of their secrets and know their true self. Yet for some it is apparent, even at a glance. Hatred blazes rage in activists' eyes. Shame in the eyes of the arrested, or horror reflected in the war photos we are morbidly drawn to. We turn a blind eye to suffering, the homeless, panhandlers and the disabled. We don't want to feel the emotions that emerge by just looking at people's struggles. We walk faster, click quickly, or even deny the tragedies.

We can learn a lot if we keep our eyes on the world around us. Honesty, passion and love are there for us to see. As Bogart said in Casablanca, "Here's looking at you kid…"

Dr. No

No! No, do it my way. Well, because I said so. No, no, no a thousand times no. Nope, you're wrong. Umm... no.

I am never sure what is up with some people. No matter what, it's always no, either overtly or subtlety. They twist, turn, and manipulate to somehow always maneuver to the negative. Perhaps it's because they are rigid, or have anal retentive characteristics? Need order and control? Need for dominance? YES!

I dislike that word "no." Sounds like a Dr. Seuss book. I can see the frumpy character, with a thundercloud halo, crushing storylines with that deflating word. I see all kinds of familiar faces in the characters. Who do you see? Mine look remarkably like some of my bosses and board members. (All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or that I wish were dead, is purely coincidental.) I am sure that there is at least one that you can picture. None of us like to have our plans, ideas, or dreams squashed by those two letters. They deflate our morale and puncture our balloons. A popped balloon is no fun.

Of course, as we develop, we need to establish boundaries between impulses and the world around us. Those boundaries are defined by the mommies seeming constant mantra, "NO." Without that, surely we would get into too much trouble. We have to act to protect our children, but do we use the words "No" too often just to discourage some inconvenience in our world? Don't make a mess... ('cause I'll have to clean it up...) Although it's great to define the expectations box we seem to operate in, sometime we have to break out of that box to achieve success right? YES!

As adults, we need the word no in our lives too. No, you have to go to work today. No, you can't buy that diamond ring. No, you can't curse out your boss. We must actively repress these drives to more socially appropriate and perhaps passively aggressive behaviors. We come in late, sneak out early, push all of our deadlines, and steal office supplies. We'll teach them to say no to us.

How do we get to yes? Why, re-framing of course. Behind every no there is a yes waiting to get out. Not a "Yes, but…" but a true yes. Can we help people harness their creativity and release their energy? Break through those self-imposed barriers that negatively constrain us? YES!

The movie "Up" showed the power of many balloons. It lifted and uplifted Carl after his wife passed. And even as most of the balloons popped during the adventure, enough remained to help Carl achieve his dreams. A new balloon is a sign of promise.

We have to balance the yes's and no's in our world. Without both, we would never achieve boundaries. But take time to know what you're agreeing or disagreeing with.

Know before you no.

Do the math

Clop, clop, clop, clop... the skeptics anxiously watched. Amazed, Clever Hans got it right! The horse could do math! But alas, math is a word that fills our minds with panic and dread. Cold sweat pours out as we even contemplate algebra. I failed it twice myself.

What is the reason for this fear? Most mathematics is simple logic, right Spock? Attention to detail, known formulas and careful execution results in... the right answer. At least that's what they say, as the right answer often seems to elude us.

Often we fail to do the math in our lives, not because it's difficult but because we are afraid of the wrong answer. We fail to look at the column of personal assets. Not the financial kind, but the good things about us. We casually look and can only see the minuses. I am too fat, ugly, poor, afraid... some days our personal spreadsheet has many red numbers. It seems that no matter what formula we use, it just doesn't add up to success. And then we let others, or our own self-defeating expectations, push our calculator buttons. Nothing ever adds up than.

But we forget. Forget that there are right answers that will result in a good, and maybe even a correct answer. We need to add in our strengths, our faith, our loved and loving. We all have talents, aptitudes and flair... we just have to pay careful attention and let our hearts lead the way. The correct answer is there; if we take time to do the math.

One of the tricks I learned years ago was estimation. For some calculations, just being able to get close is good enough for selecting an answer or path. We live in a world of imperfect choices. If we can eliminate

a few wrongs, our odds of success greatly improve. I'll take the odds every day.

Oh Clever Hans? He couldn't really count. He learned to meet the expectations of his trainer's anticipation. Although it was an entertaining parlor trick, when left alone he was totally lost. Like those that define their answers based on others. Just countless clops echoing.

Remember, it's okay to take off your shoes and socks to get to twenty. Use all of your assets. Take the time to figure it out...

Just five minutes more

I pull the covers over my head and groan as the alarm screams. It can't be time. I just lay down. The body is weary and the joints are stiff. A fog hovers between dreams and awake. Ughh.

We always want five minutes more. Well, if it's a good thing, that is. Five minutes more of sleep, or TV shows, or hope for our team to pull out a win. I can hear kids whining across America for five minutes more at bedtime and teens ignoring their parents' pleading to get out of bed. But it's just five minutes! Somehow, five minutes seems like the right number. We rarely ask for fifteen or twenty-three more minutes.

Yet what happens in the five minutes? Do those five minutes really make a difference in how awake you are? How often does your team snatch victory from the jaws of defeat? Rarely, but we still beg. This time, it WILL make a difference—right?

What if we took an extra five minutes to do something to help someone else? Can we let the mom with three kids in tow go in front of us in line? Let that driver merge in? Get a cup of coffee or a Coke for your friend? Really it's just five minutes... Bet it would make more of a difference than rolling over.

Clearance

The mailbox was overfilled. For someone that gets just a few pieces a day, it was so stuffed I had to work at removing the mail. *What the heck,* I thought.

It seems everything was on sale this week. Based on the number of ads I got, what could possibly be missing? Groceries, clothes, cars... Double coupons, direct from manufacturer and early bird specials. Full colored ads of glamorous models doing the Vanna and pointing to or wearing some new style. Some ads with pictures of items so small that my old eyes could barely make out what they were. All screaming that we need to buy them now, today, immediately.

There are few things in our emotional world that are ever on sale. Could you imagine your daily agenda arriving on your pillow each morning in full color offering discounts on your needs or wants? Complete one task at work, get one free. Fifty percent off your next sad day. Coupons for free hugs and kisses.

Life's tasks are not always easy. Chores of daily living are monotonous but usually not beyond our capabilities. Yet for many things in life, besides the mundane, we keep waiting for a sale. For some way to make that oft avoided task, thought or conversation easier. It rarely happens. Usually, the price just goes up and it's harder and harder to accomplish. Sure there are opportune moments that we regret missing, like last week's sales. But it doesn't change our needs.

As a therapist, it's my job to help people open up their sale flyer, examining their needs and wants. I try to help them to clarify what is urgent and ignore the frivolous distractions.

I haven't opened my personal flyer yet today. Am I full price at the department store or on clearance at Wal-Mart? Is that a clearance sticker on my divorced butt? What are the must-dos today versus the want to-dos?

Perhaps if we stop looking at what others think we need, we will stop looking for that sale sign.

Things that make you go hmmm

What kind of thought causes us to go...hmmm? It shifts our thinking from what we were sure of, or what made sense, to a different way of thinking. Everything from why does dish soap contain real lemons and lemon juice contain artificial flavor. Do we want our dish soap to taste better? Hmmm.

Of course, it's not dish soap or lemon juice that I ponder. I think about insight. How does something that previously made perfect sense in our logic get uprooted in an instant to make us think differently? And the more entrenched the thought, the less likely and more startling the hmmm. It causes us to totally rearrange our thinking. Kind of like when Paul Ruebins, a.k.a. Pee Wee Herman, got "caught" coming out of a porno palace. For most people, this would have been interesting but ho-hum. For the beloved popular star, it was crash and burn. We see this all of the time with beloved celebrities, like Brittany the mouseketeer, to whom we falsely attribute good characteristics to. Oops, I think I did it again.

Really, it is new thoughts, new perspectives on things that you were confident you understood. Perhaps even the fabled insight? Some say that my writing occasionally makes you say hmmm. They are the days I am vainly proud.

How come we can't reorganize our negative thoughts and self-defeating behaviors in the same way? Insight can't be forced upon us. It has to be organic. Therapists attempt to help guide clients to reinterpret, but for many this is a long arduous process. But it took 15.3 seconds for us to think differently about Pee Wee or Brittany. Is there a switch that instantly derails those neural pathways in the amygdala? Hmmm.

Me, I am going to go ponder why bottled water has an expiration date...

On the road again

For the past few years I have been far from family and friends during the holidays. So I pack up the suitcase, toss it in the car, and head down the road to those that I care about. Most years that meant a trip to see the in-laws (four hours) or my mom (ten hours.) The drone of the road.

This is my second holiday being without family. For Christmas I was with dear friends in California and spent yesterday with friends in NJ. I swapped a few texts with the kids. Not very satisfying. I am sure I sent my diet back weeks with the vast quantity of crap I ate. No worries, it's why we exercise anyway. Although I did get to visit with mom, the first time since the funeral, the graveside was solemn rather than joyous. It was good to know that she too is risen.

It seems that no matter where I am, I am never where I want to be. Always waiting for the next road trip. This morning I head back to New Hampshire (five and a half hours) I dread the journey. Miles of monotony, inconsiderate and rude drivers, and dead-stop traffic jams. But it's the price I am willing to pay.

We all have roads to travel. Things that we care about are not always within our reach. Although the map makes everything seem an inch or two away, really many of our journeys are long and hard. Any of you who have ever broken down on the road can attest to the frustration of being waylaid in some forsaken spot. But we will not reach our goals by hanging out at the rest stops.

Keep pushing forward, lean into the pedal, and motor to the next destination.

Blindside

He didn't see it coming.... than BANG! The Quarterback got hit, like by a Mack truck doing 70 on the interstate. It just laid him out, starry-eyed and numb.

Words can have that effect too. Yesterday, a few careless words laid me out. Well, metaphorically. No, they didn't mean it and had no idea that they even did it. Perhaps I was suffering from a drama king moment and I should "get over it." Well I have, but the words still hover.

There are positive blindsides too. Like when someone says an unexpected "I love you." The first time you heard those words from someone you care about produces a warm glow from your fingers to your toes. Someone told me I was "Spot-on" a few weeks back. Nothing better than an "Atta-boy" or "job well done."

It's one thing to be steeled for a moment that you see coming. You're ready to defend physically or emotionally. Most of us aren't crybabies and can weather some storm clouds. We can do it without much challenge. But being blindsided brings up strong emotion.

How best to brace for those inevitable negative blindsides? We have to immediately reach for that positive reframe, after the stars clear. What can be learned from the experience? Pick your self up, dust your self off... Walk off that blow below the belt or emotional tear. Is it difficult? Hell yes! But what is the alternative? Depression? Catatonia? Living in a bubble? Not real viable or fulfilling ways to live.

We all learn where to look from knowing our blindspots. Although next time, we swear we will wear a jock strap or look out of the back of our

head, the unexpected can waylay us again. But with each hit, we learn more about ourselves and our weaknesses.

Confidently, we must take our lessons and return to the field of play. Ready again, until the next time…

Imperfect choices

What's for dinner? Should I go to the gym? What to do this weekend? Which annoying project should I do now? Choices... it's what free will is about. It's the American way and the driving force of democracy, as long as we don't infringe on other people's choices. Choices aren't always as clear as black and white, left or right. Sometimes the choice is easy, like whether we'll go to work or get drunk. The consequences of those choices aren't really worth considering most days. Of course, some people make bad choices daily. Their choice, right...

For most choices, things are never clear. We choose from amongst imperfect choices. The more imperfect, the more we agonize. We weigh, wrestle, and list options only to end up with even more choices. Sometimes choices get lost in one-dimensional thinking or in a myriad of crystal ball illusions. And ultimately we decide and hopefully don't have many regrets. The land of woulda, coulda, shoulda is always hard to escape.

Although the choices we make define our roadmap of life, there are many paths that will get you to your goal— even if we are driving around aimlessly. Although some roads may be over the river and through the woods, and definitely not GPS approved, you'll get to where you need to be.

I prefer to think of choices as branches on a tree. All choices result in new branches that help the tree grow and flourish. Without branches, the tree is just a twig. We used to call them volunteers... just springing up from some random acorn or nut. But trees should be nourished and allowed to grow and flourish. Their branches spread far, bear leaves, and fruit. Although the branch is important, really the crown of the tree is what makes the difference. It's what provides shelter from the storm on a rainy day.

The hunger games

We are all hungry at some level... even at the most basic levels of survival. When these are threatened, or not existent, we instinctively lash back. We act with blind rage as the hunger needs are strong. In the movies, we see these huge, well-trained killing machines that seem invincible. For a few moments we think, wow...it would be nice to be that strong. Yet those characters are always the ones to die early and alone. The people that try and meet their needs by bullying and stepping on people always fail in the end. We all have people like this in our lives.

The hunger that drives is deeper and mere physical dominance really can't satisfy. Sometimes I get lost in that metaphorical rage. Impulsively strike out to try and dominate. As one friend put it, I let it rent space in my head for too long. It consumes, preoccupies and obsesses. It's hard to deal with haters. I think that's what sets me back on my heels. I just can't imagine having such poor self-worth that I needed to crush others to feel good about myself.

The haters will always hate. Even my skills as a clinician can't help those that don't want help. Sadly, they drain those of us who are always looking up. I prefer to stand on the shoulders of others, rather than their crushed bodies. The view is better from up here!

Star power

Twinkle twinkle little star... there is much wisdom to be gained from our folk songs. If you think about it, as I often do, many things stay with us for a reason. For some, it is the simplicity and elegance of the message, for others there are life lessons to learn. I am sure that if you pause for a moment, some of them flood back with powerful thoughts and emotions. Just reading the four words above results in us thinking about this simple rhyme we learned at our parent's knee.

Last night, before I pondered my pillow, I took a pause and glanced up at the twinkle. Although gray and gloomy, there were still a few stars visible. Billions of points of light illuminating the sky, each containing wishes and dreams. I am not an astrologer but can easily see why we have been fascinated with the meaning of the infinite. Meaning from nothing, world without end. One of my flashbulb moments occurred many years ago in northern Michigan, where I walked to the lake's edge on a cloudless night and stood aghast at the beauty of the night sky. No light pollution, barely a cicada chirp and glittering twinkles in the domed sky. My heart races just remembering.

Does each star hold a glimpse of the infinite? Perhaps it is the domain of Angels for their natural beauty is surely heaven sent. Thoughts flood my mind with many things, near hypnotic as you drift in melancholy. My thoughts, probably similar to yours, rise above the petty to possibilities. The future twinkles with wishes and dreams.

Today I will remember that gaze. As the drudgery and challenges of the day try to pull my thoughts away, I will remain in the world of possibilities, hope, and even dreams. When the clouds of darkness lift, this is what sparks the light of the way.

The best... so far

I am surrounded by the best. The best new products, restaurants, or inventions. New England loves to vote on the best. I can't even count how many signs I see touting the best chowda or best lobsta roll. Really, who the heck is voting on things? If one or two people say it's the best, it must be right? Of course let's not forget Best Buy—how could you go wrong there; it's the best? Unless you're the disgraced CEO who resigned in some sort of controversy.

Let's not forget besties and BFF. Seems like quite an honor to be one of these. When I was naive I thought it was beasties and couldn't figure why I wanted to be one of them. Most of us have BFF's that we can look to that are really the best. Until they do something stupid and become a demon. Are there WFF (Worst friends forever?)

Some days we are not our best. Many outside and inside influences pull us down towards the median. Maybe your energy was lacking and you didn't put it all out there. You had a rattle that wouldn't go away or were preoccupied with something. There are a million and one reasons that might interfere, many out of our control.

Do we all have to be above average? Of course if we are, then the average changes. We all want to do our best all the time but really, it's a moving target. My best today in my work out is far from my best of three weeks ago, or when I was 21. But they were all bests. If you think about technology, the best of even 6 months ago is ready for the landfill now. And if it's not the best, we don't want it. Would you shop at Average Buy?

We must accept our current best, even if it is not our idealized best. We

should continue to try and be our best but realize that it's okay if we don't achieve it... yet. As long as we try, we will continue to achieve. Savor each accomplishment, be it getting out of bed in the morning or summiting Denali. They all count.

So today may not be my best day but probably won't be my worst. The rest of the days are in the middle anyway.

Outta pocket

They were bulging and noisy. They were full of stuff that makes huge lumps bulging out of my pants, like growths. Fat wallet, house keys, rental keys, hotel room, phone, inhalers, pen, lighter, loose change, business cards and other stuff accumulated during the day. Too much junk.

I used to carry even more stuff. Men's suits have a zillion pockets to carry the stuff that you might need at any given moment. I have cargo shorts that do the same thing. At the end the day I frisk myself and stuff pours out like a win on an old-fashioned slot machine. Each one as important as the next at ready access.

We carry many things around with us each day to meet our daily challenges. Each seems to call to a different task and metaphor. Keys to success, inhalers to help us breathe and a pen to help us remember. Of course, a lighter to heat things up and a phone to call for support.

Yet as I reach in my pocket, I have to fumble around for what I need. Although everything is there, I might not pull out the right thing. Yet if I keep digging, I am sure that the tool is there.

Remember what tools you have and reach for them when needed. Your faith, your strengths and your family are probably right there within your reach. You just have to dig them out.

Peter Pan got it wrong

Twenty-one is the legal age in our country, when the last vestiges of childhood are officially gone. Time to put away the childhood dreams and move into adulthood. Sitting with my son, who reaches that milestone tomorrow. Having a beer. Almost surreal. As much for him as for me. Where did the time go?

When I grow up I am going to be rich. Have money falling out of my pockets to buy everything my heart desires. Ocean front houses, exotic cars, and beautiful women. Mortgages, maintenance, and visa bills. I can hardly wait. Eh, maybe not so much.

But I will have a career I love. Helping people solve their life challenges. Being adored by the masses for my critical thinking and astute observations. Book deals, lecture circuits and adorning fans. That weigh on your mind all of the time. Did I lead them in the right way? Help them live better lives? Hard to say. Work that is full of arrogant, narrow-minded people that control your paycheck. Barriers to fulfillment. Probably over-rated. Interviewing again. Insert lottery ticket here.

But wait, I can vote! Really make a difference by helping to change the world with better thinkers than me. Leaders that can solve the world problems. Are we better off today than four years ago? Seriously, how can I vote for that? Best of the worst I suppose. Where do we find these slugs?

Ah, but I will be loved! Have an adoring wife, kids that hang on my every word, perfect in every way. Someone to snuggle with and have amazing sex. Well the kids are amazing but where is that divorce decree again?

Twenty-one might be a winning hand in blackjack but is it in life? If you get the right cards and bet the right amount you can win. The right time, the right decision... hit me! Busted. Damn, the dealer had an ace in the hole.

We live in an imperfect world with imperfect choices. Dreams change, expectations drift away. Our wants and wishes diminish. Even for the dreamers like me. Today I won't think about all of what I don't have and count what I do... I'll do the math and count my blessings. My life is good, my kids are amazing, and most days I enjoy my job. I have some money in my pocket, food on the table, and can dream of naked supermodels.

I will be happy... I think. As long as I don't think too hard and get lost in pondering. There is always a reason not to be happy. But if you spend your time contemplating unhappy, happiness will always be a dream. Dreams are fantastic, we always have them. But don't dream your life away. Reality is better than being on the wrong side of the sod. Most days are average but that's what average is.

But it's really going to be something, when I grow up.

Power of one

It was just a single thought. Clean, clear and ever present. In the front of the mind, on the hamster wheel in the back. Churning faster, spinning constant and not to be ignored. Dare not to look at the silhouettes flashed in the strobe, illuminated and quickly fading to ghostly images. The memories of war were real, as if it happened moments ago. Misty eyes forced back into an awkward smile. This just doesn't happen to tough servicemen. It didn't happen to my dad, my wingman or anyone else. At least I don't think.

But I do think and it won't go away. Alone in my thoughts, I wait to hear that I am crazy. I must be. I used to be so strong—invincible really. First to volunteer, raise my hand to help. I got this. Let's just get it done. I'll be fine.

But I am not. I am not the same man that went to war. Sure, I look the same. My abs are strong, I can do 24 push-ups in a minute. Bounce a quarter off of my biceps. Miles in battle-rattle. It's the desert sand in my eyes must be causing the tears. Strong, powerful, but definitely alone.

But it won't go away. The images intrude at the strangest times. Especially when I don't want or expect them. Deflating but not deniable. Body bags, unrecognizable shapes that were men, fathers, and soldiers. Some days I just can't do this.

Can you help me, Doc?

Tragic stories pull at our heart. Tears hover just beyond our thoughts. The horrors of war, of serving our country, fighting for freedom. Drawn into the world of our clients. Emotions raw no matter how hard we try. Strength pulled from deep depths to find the right words. To walk with him as we fear no evil.

Yes, I can help. Provide empathy, direction and normalcy. Slow the wheel and let the thoughts escape. Offer voice and affirmation. Face the demons in the desert and under your bed. Help you to be a better but different man. Stronger, unafraid and able to make those trembling steps to the next phase of your life. We can do this... it just takes time, honesty, and determination. It will get better.

Turning the power of one thought, of one man, to make a difference. It may not make the world a better place, but for him it did.

Polarize

No matter how hard I try, sometimes I just lose things. In spite of careful planning, organizing and packing before my move, my sunglasses just disappeared. For weeks after the move, I scoured everywhere and they were just not to be found. Poof, into a different dimension, like my missing socks in the laundry.

Last summer in my shades, I was so cool tooling around in my little sports car. Imagining I looked like a movie star with the wind in my hair. Everything was colored warm and subdued. Life was good.

But for the past several months, I have been squinting in the sun. Everything washed out, glaring and stark. Dropping the visors helped a little but it was next to impossible to drive into the sun.

The optician pointed to new frames and expensive lenses—the most expensive in the store of course. Transitions, he insisted, were the best way to go. Automatically darkening in the light. I had a pair before and I hated them. They never changed fast enough. Things were too dark when they should have been light. You still end up squinting, just indoors.

As I pondered and posed in the mirror, we evaluated tints. Gray, amber or the proverbial rose-colored lens that social workers are partial too. They all took the edge off and helped tone down the bright.

We forget that the world can be a stark place. Although we crave the sun, sometimes it is hard to cope with. We squint at things, wondering if a doom is looming around the bend. So we crane or necks to the shade, trying to avoid the intense brightness that blinds us to reality. Things can become

washed out and difficult to see. Most days we can do just fine, until it just gets too bright and reality sucks.

Transitions are difficult. We move from the bright to the dark and back to the bright; we have to be able to focus quickly. Enjoying the bright but evaluating the danger. Rose-colored glasses can be wonderful, but the world isn't always rosy.

Solace can be found by filtering our world through faith and love. When it's too bright or too dark, our faith will see us through. We may not be cool, but in the end we will see through to the light.

Namaste

The morning echoes, never alone in silence. Soft whispers of thoughts emerge before the day's chaos. Pre-coffee thoughts in the twilight of being half there but half not. Focusing on the Namaste, the light within you, when nothing else is really there.

But there is something there, you just don't grasp it. Subtle hints of thoughts seeking an audience. Not dreams, not real but a swirl of silence before the before. Try as you might, when you reach it's gone. Not a sound, but a Ohm, your heartbeat and breath.

Sometimes when we wake up, things seem so clear. Perhaps this is the voice of our soul reaching for enlightenment. You wake up with the solution to yesterday's problem, be it something simple that you forgot, or a life direction. Sometimes profound but other times just comforting. We luxuriate and linger, basking in the glow of the night.

Oft times we fail to listen to our inner voice. Usually it is clear and elegant. It is clouded by the chaos of reality. But thoughts of love, of being and safety come from this primitive voice. It helps us to center and balance.

Listen and you will hear.

Click three times

It's been a long week and it's not over yet. After having walked miles around the installation for the second day, I am tired. Day seven of a thirteen day stretch. I wander, reaching to find those with challenges with their lives. Imparting wit and wisdom to help guide or inspire people to make changes in their world to find what they seek. From new solutions to pressing problems, or just provide momentary relief from the day's drudgery. Always on, checking in with those I know or need to know. The challenges can be great, from domestic violence to sick children. Long days and short nights. It's exhausting.

Finally home, my mouse mindlessly hovers, cursor flashing, insisting to be clicked. What updates or emails are there from friends to call me to their world tonight? Did they have a good day? What were their challenges and achievements? How many people read the blog today… is there a kind word or two on my musings? Did I touch someone? Is there a note from the kids or a friend? Click on my home page and check… again. It's comforting. Click again.

We all want and need to go home, wherever that home might be. We think of a physical location, where all of our stuff is. I look around with satisfaction of all the things that fit just right. From the thrift store bargains to the expensive splurges, my belongings express my tastes, personality and lifestyle. But it's just stuff. It is for the keyboard I reach, to connect to the faraway things and people I care about.

Like Dorothy, I click three times to go home.

Chip away

The thrift stores I haunt are full of them. Shelf after shelf of mismatched, unloved, and chipped dishes. From fine crystal to promotional items, they all wait for a new home. Items originally purchased with care to grace our tables and serve our daily bread. And I know how they got there. My dishwasher eats dishes.

At least four times this year I've opened the door and found chipped or cracked dishes. When I moved here I went out and bought new dishes. Nothing fancy, just some plain white stuff. Although many bachelors resort to paper, I was on a quest to be able to set a nice table for my guests. I wanted it all to match, to be perfect. But the dishwasher was having none of that. Maybe it's passive aggressively hating me for not running it enough or unloading it fast enough.

Some of the glasses and dishes were hopelessly cracked, a few even totally smashed. Into the trash with a curse they went, banished to the landfill. But some just had a small chip and went back into the cupboard to serve another day. Any of us with kids probably all have a few in our cabinets. Too good to pitch but not perfect anymore.

Many times we get chipped in our daily lives. Something bumps us or doesn't strike us right and we get the proverbial chip on our shoulder. Of course we want to be perfect but the chip continues to annoy us. Like a chip on a tooth that our tongue can't help but to run over. We're afraid that the chip maybe become a crack and obsessively feel its sharp edges.

A chipped dish still works. It can hold a full plate and still keep serving a purpose. It may not be perfect but is too good to throw out. It may

cut you if you're not careful, but with a little care you can learn how to avoid it. Just put it back in the cupboard and forget it. It will remind you that next time, perhaps you should be more careful but really, you're still fine.

Ticking

I am surrounded by clocks. A quick count indicates that there are more than ten clocks in my apartment, more than a dozen watches and two cell phones to tell me what time it is, to the minute. I have two that chime, never in sync, so I don't even have to look at them. I even have one that projects on my bedroom ceiling so I don't even have to be fully awake to know the time. Batteries, wind-up and even solar powered. No matter which way I look, there is a clock. Sadly, many of them don't keep good time.

Our lives are dominated by time. Time to go to or get off from work, time for that meeting or it's about time I told them what I think. We look at our wrists or phones dozens of times daily to be on time. God forbid we are late.

But what time is it? Is it time to make a change—just one more time? Time to fall in love or begin a new adventure? Or is it time to reflect and regroup? In spite of all of these clocks, there will never be a perfect time. We end up guessing and go with it.

No time like the present, right?

Unfinished

The wood was smooth and unblemished. It would be easy to cover with a coating of mahogany red stain and be perfect for my dining room buffet. It would be very satisfying to see it transform. But it was expensive... more than I wanted to spend on my budget.

I went to the thrift store and found one. It was well loved and showed its age. But with a little work, I thought, it could be as good as new. I liked its character. Maybe I could just touch it up. A little sanding and the blemishes would fade. I pondered the task, having refinished furniture before. The flat pieces are fine... easily stripped. But all of the detail work takes practice, patience, and care. Hmm, what to do...

Sometimes we feel unfinished. Simply rub on a new dream and we will transform. Like imagining yourself driving that new sports car and being in perfect shape. We imagine what life would be like if.... The fantasy magazine ads are so glamorous. We feel we need something that will help us race to the finish.

Then we look back at our seemingly thrift store world and think with a sigh, that's not really us either. We have too many rough edges to be loved. We wouldn't look that good even if we were refinished. Things never come out like the picture anyway. At least my refinishing projects don't.

I am glad to be unfinished. Most of the time, I like my bumps and scrapes. It is the patina of our character that makes us unique. Without that, we would just be raw and need sanding. I certainly don't want to relive any of that.

In the end, I didn't buy either. I'll just be happy with what I have...

Days like this

Sore and stiff, I wake up to the usual urgent need. No sooner do I get up then I slam my toe into the bathroom doorframe. As I hop to the toilet, the lid decides to close before I finish. Downstairs, the stinky bouquet reminds me that I forgot to take out the trash. As I reach, the can spills yesterday's leftovers all over my sore toe. Then as I reach to pick up the lovely mess, my hand grazes something sharp and I begin to leak blood. Really? It's not even 6am yet!

Some days are like that. No matter what you do, the unexpected gets in the way. Your best bleary-eyed intentions get lost in a pile of trash. You so want to crawl back into bed and hide. With my luck today, the bed would probably collapse. Great, I think, it's going to be one of those days.

My mind races over the day's agenda, thinking about what needs to get done and I quickly anticipate failures. Best not to try this or that because I am doomed.

Self-fulfilling prophecies can be powerful. But we get choices. Just because something bad has happened doesn't give you the right to have a bad day. None of us emerge from life without scars but we get the choice about how we let them affect us. We can crawl back in the collapsed bed surrounded by self-pity or we can use the power of positive thinking to emerge stronger.

The trash is dispatched, the cut isn't bad and the coffee is finally brewing. Things are looking up! Wait, is that a leak in the ceiling?

Not a good day to take up skydiving.

Close shave

For a while I looked like Santa Claus. I had a beard since adolescence; I thought it made me look older. When you're young, that seemed to count for something. But as I got older, the beard turned gray. Initially it was streaked with distinction. Then 'poof', snow white. My older brother used to call me his older brother. I was a lot heavier too. Really, a red suit would have completed the picture. Ho, Ho, Ho. The military doesn't permit beards so when I began my travels with them, off it came.

I still hate shaving. Electric razors don't cut it so I use the barbaric open blade. It's a good close shave. Until I get a nick. Then it's annoying. The nick never really gets a chance to heal as the blade drags over it every day. Try as you might, you just can't avoid it. Shaggy or bleeding seem to be the only choices. Bleeding seems to be the only real choice since you have to shave to be respectable. Bleeding isn't really a good choice though.

Sometimes, careless things make us bleed. Thoughtless words, withering looks, and mistreatment, all have the power to make us feel angry or hurt. And then we ruminate, keeping the emotion raw or thinking of ways to avoid it. Sometimes successful, other times, not so much. But healing takes time, and not much can speed up the process. Even if it is a little thing. But most times, we will heal.

A styptic pencil will cure the nick for the day. If it's still raw on the weekend, I'll adopt the trendy two day shadow look for a bit.

Not a drip

The sensuous pleasure is almost erotic as the water pulses hot on my body. I just love showers, especially hot, strong, steamy ones. As I stand there in the cascade, it caresses the tiredness and worries away, down the drain. The shower at the gym is pathetic. Not only do I have to bear the indignity in shower shoes, the walls seem to have a layer of gray grunge that always persists. The experience is far from pleasurable. My old garden hose had more pressure and heat when it was in the sun. Somehow, it doesn't help the soreness from the workout.

Showering when I had my leg cast was awful, too. I either had to stand in a hefty bag or suffer a sponge bath. I resented each one. I have tried taking a bath and it's just not me. One of my houses had a whirlpool tub. The jets felt great but soaking in a tub of dirty, lukewarm water after ten minutes didn't work for me. Sure, I guess I was clean, but it was like kissing your cousin (I guess).

It is important to start each day fresh, full of possibilities. Yesterday's challenges belong to yesterday. Let some fresh thinking warm possibilities invigorate. No matter how bad, or how dirty you get, you can wash it away with positive thoughts and prayer.

...and let it go until the water runs cold.

Step up

Nineteen stairs from the parking lot to my front door, another fourteen if I want to go up to my bedroom. It's a real pain when I am carrying things, especially if a workout tied up my hamstrings. I silently curse my trainer with each step, teetering a little bit like I just got off a horse.

Taking the stairs is always a challenge. There are always elevators and escalators that will zip you to the top, but where is the accomplishment in that? The steps are a great exercise. Could you imagine Rocky taking the elevator to the top of the steps at the Philadelphia Art Museum?

Many times we try to take the elevator to reach our goals. We think a quick push, the doors close and you're there. But even if you get there quickly, it doesn't carry the same sense of accomplishment. With the stairs, each measured step takes us closer to our goal, carefully allowing us to pace ourselves and take a breath on a landing if needed. True goals shouldn't be easy or they are not really goals. Kind of like the difference between a self-made man and a lottery winner—who do you respect more?

Life is a journey with many steps. Take each one, even if they are hard. Enjoy the landings but keep looking up. You'll feel better about yourself when you reach the top.

Cat sense

The barn kitten must have crawled up in to the engine seeking warmth on the cool fall day. There were many wild cats that lived on the farm—the clients were always chasing them. They provided a sense of comfort and amusement for the handicapped adults we worked with. But it wasn't so lucky for this one. When the engine turned over there was a chilling screech and this little kitten fell out of the car severely injured. It really looked bad for the little thing; it was hard to imagine him surviving.

But the kitten was lucky. Just so happened that the guy who ran the farm had some penicillin and we treated him. For days, the swelling seemed to increase but then after a series of scary convulsions, the cat miraculously began to get better. We named him Daniel, of Boone fame, since he was a survivor. In the days and weeks that followed, he regained his health and became part of the family.

However, Daniel had challenges. He had lost most of his sight. Still a kitten, he had boundless energy but would be a bit clumsy. But his peripheral vision seemed intact. We could roll a ball and he'd pounce on it until it stopped, then he would fall over it. He would make exaggerated leaps over tiny things in his path to be sure he cleared them.

For some reason, he loved to jump up on things. He would leap to the top of the sofa and then on anything higher until he ended up on a soffit that ringed the living room. Of course then, he couldn't get down. We even put his food and water there so he wouldn't starve while we weren't home. He was quite the character. When we moved, sadly Daniel couldn't make the trip and we gave him to a friend with a farm. Turns out he was an excellent

mouser and taught his new friends. His peripheral vision served him well.

Daniel figured out how to overcome his disability. Innately, he found his talents and used them to help others. There are times when we fail to use our natural abilities. We strive to be the perfect cat and fail to see our strengths. It would have been easy for him to have been a lap cat, lounging in lethargy, waiting for his next cuddle. He looked pretty silly jumping a foot high to get over a pencil in his path. But he pushed himself, to the highest part of the room, to find fulfillment.

We all have talent. Even though sometimes it might seem unusual or make us look silly. In exploring what we can do, as opposed to what we can't, we can find happiness. Use your inner drive, think positive and take those leaps and you can achieve your destiny.

Leave a mark

Crunch! I must have been distracted as I was backing out and didn't see her. Our bumpers hit with a slight but definite crunch. My heart raced and I was pissed, at her and myself. My brand new car... Damn. As I surveyed the damage I was surprised that really it was a very, very minor scrape but there was a definite mark. Nothing tragic but still frustrating. Given today's prices, I figured it was only going to be a thousand bucks to buff it out.

We get frustrated when the things we care about get scarred or broken. Depending on the injury, we immediately begin trying to figure out how to make it perfect again. To erase that blemish and return it to new condition. I always grin when I think about the humor of Tim Allen who always used to say, "That's going to leave a mark" when quipping on some latest injury. It seems that we all want to be flawless. Of course, given life's misadventures, that isn't possible.

Life's fender benders are inevitable. Our new things become old and a well-loved worn. There are marks on our cars, our possessions, and our souls. Most don't interfere with their functionality but we feel they devalue us. But not all marks are tragic. As I move through my day I think, did I leave a mark? Have I helped someone through a tough time or even just made them smile?

Our actions and words can have a profound effect on those around us. Sometimes they are extremely damaging but other times they can be healing or even life changing. If you leave your mark on someone, your influence will always be there. Why would we want to erase it?

Take care as you navigate. Be sure to look both ways before you proceed. Your words and actions speak louder than your intentions. A careless movement may crush someone but a kindness will mark their soul with goodness.

I can only hope that I leave a positive mark on those I touch.

Bumper to bumper

Brake lights and bumpers, tail lights as far as you can see. A holiday weekend commute filled with traffic, congestion, and annoyance. Why can't those idiots just stay right? The light is green... go already! Hell no, not into my lane—get behind me, I was here first. I am going to be too late to relax. I franticly press buttons on the GPS to see if there is another way to go. Forget it, just wait.

We spend our lives waiting. We tap on the accelerator only to quickly find the brake as someone else seems to take their turn. It seems everyone is in front of us living the dream.

Spending some of your moments in anticipation is fine, if you can experience the joy of the here and now. At the end of the day, we will all get to where we need to be. Maybe a little later than we want, but we'll get there.

Enjoy each moment, be in the present and enjoy the ride

White caps

Waves crashing at the foot of the cliffs, surf tickling the sand or still water reflecting the spring splendor... it all recharges me. Its ceaseless unpredictability appeals to my poet's soul. I can get lost in pensive ponderings staring out to the horizon.

My kids hated the ocean when they were little. I think the pull of the tide scared them. Getting clobbered by waves didn't help either. Where I find inspiration, they found dread. However, they really did love splashing in pools. Much more predictable.

Sometimes waves of emotion try to pull us out to sea. The torrent of tide rushes over us, quite unexpectedly and we are overcome. Emotions are like that. They come out of nowhere and crash! You are left a bit dazed and worn. When we look to the horizon, we can see the white caps coming and fully brace ourselves for the impact. Turn your back for a minute however and you can easily be overcome. And even when we are prepared and unafraid, the tide still tries to pull us out to sea.

Water has an amazing ability to transform. It adapts beautifully to its environment. From frozen cubes to misty tears, it can find balance and utility. It will eventually find its level if left undisturbed, filling in all the crannies and becoming still.

Given the choice, I will always choose the ocean. Emotions are best expressed and explored. They may not be level, but emotions are what make us human. The magnificence of the waves brings excitement to our lives and makes us feel alive.

Home station

Dad's going to miss my game tonight... but I am going to get a hit for him. He would be so proud, I can hear him cheering "atta-boy, way to go slugger!" I am going to run real hard and make it first. If only you could see me, dad.

What do you mean we're moving again –where the heck is that? What about my friends? Can we go back to our last base? I miss all my friends. What about the dance? It's not fair! It's okay Dad, I am proud of you.

I just don't know how I am going to do it. The kids are so busy—I can't be everywhere. We're just going to have to skip something. Dinner? We'll grab something on the way—there is just no time. I hope he calls tonight, it's been three days. I saw on the news about the attack and I just don't know where he is. Be safe my love.

War is different now than when I was in one. We were in the trenches up to our butts in mud. But you could see the enemy—you knew he was there. Sure, there were sneak attacks, but we were ready. Not like these smart bombs and IED's. Now you never know. Come home safe son.

Our men and women serve our country proudly. Many make the ultimate sacrifice for our freedoms. On the 4th of July, we proudly honor their service with celebrations, parades, and solemn services. But those left at home make a million sacrifices uncelebrated. Sons, daughters, parents and spouses sacrifice every day to support our servicemen. Yet they are unheralded. But their sacrifice is no less great. In the end, when their serviceman comes home in a joyous reunion or a flag draped casket, know that they too did it all for us.

Leafing

It was really no more than a weed. A volunteer that had sprung up last year in a neglected flower bed. Spindly and forlorn, surrounded by litter and molded leaves from the fall. Carried by the wind and covered by dust, it had found nourishment to live. But even an inattentive gardener would not have hesitated to rake it out in a microsecond.

But it stood proud and tall, perhaps slightly crooked, definitely taller than this past year's icy snow. On one side was last year's leaf, still clinging to the stem. Wouldn't take much to knock it off. One the other, a new bud was urgently trying to emerge. Barely perceivable, but its green goodness was hinting through. Some attention and nurturing would result in thriving growth. I wondered if it would survive the rake to full bloom.

Leaving is a difficult process. It requires letting go of the old and forcing out the new. It's simple to cling onto the past and reminisce about the successes and storms. The cold of hardship can weigh heavy as snow in the winter.

But even carelessly scattered and ignored, you can be nurtured to bloom. Doesn't take much really. The sun of a smile, small encouragements and praise, and you thrive. Last year's leaves are good mulch to protect, but inner determination will reawaken to the new love that is all around you. Mighty or forlorn, your inner strength awaits the spring of your potential.

Lean to

I was tired. It was a long day and I collapsed against the counter waiting in line. Around me were others leaning on all sorts of things, from the doorway to the wall. One guy was leaning on a cane. It was apparent that something was up with his back as he was very hunched over. Everyone was just taking a quick break as we waited to be next in line.

Usually, I have a bit of spring in my step. I walk quickly and purposely, moving from point to point as I cross the wide open spaces. It seems to take no time at all to get from here to there. It wasn't the case when I broke my leg and had to drag the cast around, Igor or Frankenstein-like. It was such a pain. But gradually, I was able to stand upright again and get back to moving forward.

We always try to be upright and properly vertical. Take the high road and navigate the obstacles in our path. But sometimes the terrain is rocky or we are unsteady and caution is indicated. I remember doing an overconfident face plant as I cockily tried to leap a stream in Hawaii. I should have taken the hand of the guy in front of me when he extended it.

We all need to lean sometimes. Although we try to be the best we can be, sometimes we get tired. We feel that we should be able to do things without help. As we lean into tasks like the Lone Ranger, we think we can survive. Until we can't. But even the Lone Ranger had Tonto to lean on.

Look to your family, friends and faith when you need them, before you do a face plant. Sometimes just a little lean will help refresh and get you vertical again.

Dumpster diving

The floor was littered with debris around the trash can. Scraps of paper, notes, phone numbers and remnants of candy bars long gone. At some point, each of the pieces of trash had value. Important plans, critical information, or just random musings and wrappings. But as things change and lose their purpose, it's off to the trash for them. We haul it out at least weekly or when it is stinky or overflowing.

I used to love trash picking as a kid. I'd wander the streets on trash day looking for treasures that sparked my interest. Most of the time, the stuff at the curb needs to be there. But other times I was amazed at the stuff people pitched. I'd haul the crap home and disassemble it, to just add it to my collection of treasures. It was free fun.

Sometimes we have to dive back into our emotional trash bin to see what we put in there. Carefully examining the contents to see if there isn't value to the things in in there. We can't keep everything but sometimes we need to re-examine things, based on new priorities. Most of it can go right back in but others might need further consideration. I know I have definitely thrown out things that I now regret. The landfills are full of people (and critters) looking for those things that still might have usefulness.

At the end of the day, most of what was scattered on the floor was truly trash. Not much utility in an M & M bag. I did find a pros and cons list and held it out to look at again. There was a phone number too. I could have recreated the list and re-found the phone number, but I was glad I checked.

Now what to do with that polyester pant suit? Not even the thrift store wants that…

Outta the dark

Flash! The bulb blew as I hit the switch. Damn, now I can't see, or see well anyway. The flash made fireworks in my eyes and everything was kind of sparkly for a minute. But now it fades to shades of gray. Shadowy figures, I have no clue where another lamp is in the hotel room, and I fumble around patting down the walls and bumping into things. My shins ache as I anticipate hitting the bed any second.

My old office building was very green. All of the lights would go off if things were too still. In the middle of a meeting, the room could be plunged into darkness. You'd have to simply wave and the light would come on. I always felt like Maxwell Smart as I traveled down the hallway having the lights all go on in front of me.

Things are so clear when the lights are on. Everything is bright and well-defined. There are many different kinds of light that provide illumination, from incandescent, to florescent, and the painfully slow sodium vapor that trickles in from the street light. Of course, natural sunshine is the best as it lights our days and brings a sense of joy when it burns through the clouds. Almost everyone smiles on sunny days

Some days and times are a bit dark and we fumble around for light. The shades of gray make things unclear and we have to use our other senses to see. Hyperawareness as we envision what we know is there. On real dark days we look to the Son for illumination to our challenges. There is guidance there but the path can still be a bit muddled even on bended knee.

Sometimes finding solutions are as simple as a wave of a hand or a new

bulb. But usually we have to wander in the dark for a bit to find the light. If we wait long enough, the Son will come up and we'll be able to see again. Knowing that makes the darkness easier to bear. The path may not be clear but at least it will be bright.

Once said

The mom was hunched over the toddler, fussing about something. She was obviously harried a bit and juggling bags, coats, and whatnot. The bus driver stooped slightly and made some pleasant exchange with the little girl that made her smile. The mom answered for the little girl saying "thank you" and then in the same breath, "What do you say to the nice man?" The little girl looked a bit puzzled but then uttered something in a soft voice that I assume was thank you. Just a teaching moment.

It is always a pleasure watching people teach their children. I think that many parents, especially the helicopter ones, often neglect to give their kids direction. They feel its ok for their kids to claim a sense of entitlement and keep moving on. Of course this will translate into somewhat egotistical behaviors as an adult. They say that this generation is the most over-praised.

But wouldn't it be nice if we had someone who helped us to say the right thing? Sometimes not only do I put my foot in my mouth, I somehow get the whole leg down there. Mouth engages before brain kicks in. It's rare, but it happens. Of course, almost as soon as you say the wonderfully prophetic and stupid thing, you try to reframe it to make it better. Eh, sometimes not so much, though. The hole gets deeper.

It is important to think, and then to think again before you speak. First you need to have some intent of what you want to say and then think about who is listening. Just saying what you feel without thinking about who is listening will almost always get you in the stew. Not so much a filter, but a frame of reference.

It's okay to express your thoughts but take a moment and think about how it will impact your audience. Once said it can't be unsaid.

Hop to it

He was jet black, a very large crow or perhaps even a raven. Gracefully circling the lot, soaring on the cool breeze. He was able to stay aloft with barely a wing flap. He was silent but had a presence. He seemed to command the space around him. He swooped, perhaps eyeing some sort of prey, then bounced back high into the morning mist. It was a graceful, inspiring dance on the wind as I pondered my morning coffee.

He landed on my car, on the rear wiper actually. It was a strange sight. He picked at the window seeming to try and peck at his reflection. Now, if I was superstitious, I would have thought sure that this was a sign of something. It was weird to be sure.

In a moment he hopped off into the grass. It seems that in order to get around, he needed to hop. It was a strange and silly sight to see. This two-foot tall bird was hopping around on the lawn, still trying to seem graceful. It looked pretty awkward. He was definitely out of his environment and a bit vulnerable. But he ended up picking at something he spotted and seemed satisfied. In a glimpse, he was aloft. Two mighty, strong pumps of his wings and he quickly disappeared in to the sky.

It seems that for each strength we are given, we have a counterbalancing weakness. Although mighty and graceful at one, we feel kind of silly and vulnerable at others. This bird would probably starve if it never landed. At some point, we all have to land into our weaknesses. It is only through our weaknesses that we find our strengths. Yet it is through our strengths that we can soar.

Saved by grace

I must have been doing at least 50 and the Semi-truck was dead-stopped in the center lane. Half dozing at 1:30 am after five hours on the road, I just didn't tune in to it until the last moment. Anti-lock brakes work! I slammed and swerved somehow avoiding the median wall and his bumper. In a flash, it was all over and I sat in amazement that I didn't hit something. Way too close.... I would have been a bug on a windshield. And that was the second of three close calls today.

Traffic had suddenly slowed to a crawl just outside of Boston. No worries, I was a mere three miles from my destination. An hour later my gas gauge screamed empty. Of course, stuck in the center lane of a standstill, I thought I was for sure going to be the next traffic blockage. I push the GPS to find gas and somehow twenty minutes later, definitely running on prayers, I reach the destination indicated to find... no gas station! I am doomed I think. I push the next target and I think I coasted into the next station to put 16.1 gallons in a 16 gallon tank. Made it!

About 2.5 minutes from my destination at two am, I was again saved. Somehow I missed a left turn red-light and was blessed to have had a cop just behind me. Of course he thought me drunk... why the hell else would I break a law with him right behind me? After a quick recitation of the ABC's, without singing, and recounting my hour delay at midnight at the George Washington Bridge he gave me a stern warning.

And that was just an 8 hour section of the day! Sometimes I fuss and complain about my world. Reaching to inner strength, I look for insight to change my thinking. Many days, this takes a few moments to refocus and

a wonderful metaphor. Today, no such pondering was necessary. Grace, luck, and blessings were obviously with me. And for that I am grateful, to be saved.

When I made the turn to head back on the freeway, there was a homeless guy panhandling on the corner. Generally, we all try and ignore these people. We think, "someone should do something about that." This time I did, I rolled down the window and gave him a few bucks.

Pay it back and forward. Be thankful. Pray because you believe, not because you want or need something. You never know when you might need an undeserved break or three.

Fuzzy edges

I don't even remember falling asleep. I must have been out like the proverbial light. After six hours or so, I opened my eyes and everything was hazy. Rolling over for a few more winks, an hour or so later my eyes popped open and everything was still fuzzy. I tried to rub the sleepers from eyes and one eye cleared but the other is still fuzzy some thirty minutes later. I must still be half asleep.

If I look at something in the center of my vision, it is pretty clear and detailed. I can read the type for instance. But if I look to the right, things disappear into a cloud of blur. Even looking to the left, the clear side, produces some distortion. It's a bit unusual.

Things straight in front of us are usually clear. Concepts, courses of action and decisions are perfect when linear. Often times though, there are many things in our periphery that distract us. We look to the left or right and things lose focus. If we stare straight at them, they appear to be clear until we refocus on the path in front of us. But like a cat, we all track things. We see things out of the corner of our eyes that seem to need our attention to come into focus. But for the most part, they are mere distractions from our goals.

Today I think I need to just look straight ahead. Too many fuzzy edges. Maybe I should just clean my glasses?

Deceptions and reflections

Back in the dark ages when I was in high school, the stoners used to play a game called Zoom. I really don't remember the complex rules but it involved a Zoomer, truth-tellers, and a few other weird groups. But if I recall, part of the game was to figure out who was telling the truth. Perhaps I was (and still am) a bit gullible and I never seemed to get it right. I always wanted to believe the things that people told me.

Some people seem to be deceitful by nature. There are many types of lies, from those that are supposed to be good, like saying you like your Aunt Martha's sauerkraut cherry cobbler, to everything politicians say to aggrandize points and positions. It's easy to get lost in the rhetoric. We are always faced with the task to believe or not believe. And although it seems we all have this dislike for lawyers and the law, if people only told the truth and were kind, we'd have no need for the profession.

Some truths are absolute and we get it. But most truths are not so clear. What is true for one person is not true for someone else. Although we seem to value the people who always tell the truth, we are appalled by people without filters. Sure, there are ways to say things to not offend, but the more you filter the message, the more you end up trying to mislead and misdirect, just to make a point. And the people who are good at it are wildly rich and successful—but probably dishonest. Fill in the blank with the latest scandal of a televangelist or disgraced CEO.

The tangled web of deception always destroys trust. Even simple lies create barriers to true relationships. And although we all know this, many continue to deceive forcing us to spend our days listening and sorting, trying to

make heads or tails of messages and meanings. Some days my head just hurts with the chaos. Like lawyers, therapists would probably be out of business if people were more honest with each other and themselves.

Truthfulness is best judged in the mirror. It is reflected in integrity and character. If you are true to yourself and strive to be in your thoughts and actions, you have achieved greatness.

Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear.

Walk on

He was probably half-drunk—they frequently are. My condo is right outside a path between downtown Portsmouth and the hotel, so it gets lots of foot traffic at all hours of the day and night. Usually about 2 or 3 am, many people stumble by on their way home. There are a few concrete steps to navigate. By the shrieks of laughter that awakened me, I am guessing this guy fell at about 3am.

My condo is surrounded by all kinds of pavement. There is concrete, brick, stamped concrete, asphalt, and loose gravel. Each is in various states of disrepair. The undulating bricks show heavy wear with lots of sinkholes and broken pieces. The concrete is really bad, heavily cracked, pitted and kind of dangerous—especially by the stairs. The street is full of cracks and potholes and the gravel path is smeared beyond its edges.

Although all walkable, each requires careful footing. The careless frequently stumble. The concrete looks the worst as several attempts to patch it have failed miserably. It really looks like crap. They only way to really fix it would be to jackhammer it all out and replace it.

Even though the bricks are old and worn, somehow that adds to their character. They harken to a bygone age of cobblestones and the revolutionary war. Although difficult, it wouldn't be much to fix them. Pull sections of them up, re-lay a base, and replace the originals. They are so much more romantic than the faked stamped pavers.

Sometimes we lose our footing, especially when we aren't paying attention. If we walk carefully, we can easily make our way. But if we stop paying attention, it's easy to fall. Yet for all of the surfaces, the bricks are probably

the safest. Even though undulating from their wear, much as we are from life, they remain study and resistant. We can easily repair a few bad spots without losing our character. In the meantime, if we just pay attention to our foundations and footing, we can easily navigate everything easily.

It helps to be sober too.

Traveling thoughts

It was pretty much the trip from hell. Stranded on a flight that was late for two-and-a-half hours on the tarmac. Missed multiple connecting flights in spite of racing through the airport, OJ style, to see the plane back out before I reached the gate. The last flight, on a prop plane, was three-and-a-half hours later, and then was delayed another hour. And don't get me started on TSA.

But yet, it was OK. I met a very interesting woman carrying live lobsters, that she named. A soldier being discharged due to an injury, a nice family, and countless other friendly people. I can strike up a conversation with anyone—and often do. It makes life richer and fuller; there is always an adventure to be found.

Life's byways and paths frequently take you to the unknown. In spite of numerous challenges, your days are what you make of them. It would have been easy to have been all grumpy and ticked off, but what's the point? Smiles, kindness, and a *Que Sera, Sera* attitude wins the day.

Of course I can talk about lemons and lemonade but really, lemons are lovely but way too bitter to make lemonade. You need to add a sweetener. When you approach your challenges with a positive attitude, things work out better.

I eventually arrived, intact, with luggage, but tired. Really, it was a good day.

Doodles

Aimlessly, I scribble on my page. It's one of those things that I don't do often as most of the time I am typing on the PC rather than using pen and paper. Designs emerge and are transformed into a semi-recognizable shape, only to be transformed into something different. Not really an image but if I add a little here and shade that… well it's still just a scribble. I have no talent when it comes to drawing. I often quip that I can't even draw a straight line with a ruler.

Art was never a strong suit for me. In school, I used to try to draw. I would careful study the image and will my pencil to draw the shape. But my images never quite looked like what we were supposed to copy. Most of them weren't even recognizable. It was pretty frustrating. But I would try, and still do, to make them right. Most times they ended as a crumpled page tossed into the trash bin.

But art and beauty are in the eyes of the beholder. Things that some people find hideous others find beauty in. I remember going to the Museum of Modern Art in New York and thinking, like millions do, "Is that really art?" Somebody must have thought so if it ended up in a museum. I suppose if you ponder anything long enough you can find beauty in the ordinary.

Our worlds are full of color and shapes. Sometimes the lines are clean and clear and lead us to our personal images. But most times, we really can't copy what we see or want. We envy what others have and think that that's what we want too. But each of us is differently-abled. Even though our images may be identical to those around us, we bring our unique perspective

to our own life's drawing. It may not look like much to others, but there is beauty in each one of us. If only we take the time to direct it.

Express your talents through your actions, since they will help shape your images to personal fulfillment. Even stick figures can be beautiful.

Ripples

The lobby was silent—it was five am. The LCD screens flickered the latest news as I sat waiting for breakfast. My gaze fell onto the silent, round fountain. It was an ornate, contemporary thing that was apparently off for the night. The images from the TV reflected back from the fountain water as clear as if I was watching the TV. I tried to make out what the talking head was saying but it was impossible. But the images of fire, police arrests, weather and other news of the day was on the screen. It was better without the volume, anyway.

A young family bustled by and the little girl stopped and tugged at her mom. I couldn't hear what they were saying but a coin magically appeared and the girl tossed it in the fountain. It rippled the images away, slowly returning to its mirror finish. I wonder what she wished for?

Although reflected images may be clear, they are easily disturbed by reality. Each thing that we do causes a ripple in the world. Although you may not notice it in the large pond, in small circles it really makes a difference. We may not be able to cure cancer or stop the war, but each thing that we do can make a difference. Although the fountain was in no danger of overflowing from the addition of the coin, its water level surely rose... just by a bit. Isn't that what we all hope for? To at least make a little difference in our small circles?

Go ahead, make a wish and watch the ripples. For at least those that you touch, you *can* make a difference.

I know what I know

I wonder why a lot. Some days I feel like a five year old... with questions about everything. I mean, some things I know, or think I know. But then maybe not so much? It's especially annoying when I think I know and it turns out I don't. Or what I knew is no longer what I know. Ya know?

We are confident in our thoughts and knowledge. The sun will rise and we have to pay taxes. Some things are absolute. But most things aren't. Uncertainty abounds all around us. Actually, it might be uncertainty that drives behavior. We really want predictability in our world. We want to know that when we do "A," "B" will happen. But at least in my world, when I do "A," many times "C," "D," and "Q" happens. It can be frustrating.

The only thing for sure is change. What we knew yesterday may have made sense yesterday, but today it's just not right any more. We can guess about what will be right tomorrow but then we're probably wrong about today.

Confused yet? No wonder! It's not about being right or wrong, it's about living life to the fullest. If it doesn't matter who is right, why can't we both be? Maybe if we spent less time in wondering and more time in doing, we'd do something right. Or at least that's right, right now.

I got something

Words and images are blank. I stare at the screen and think, *I have nothing to say*. No words of wit or wisdom. No humorous analogies, metaphors, or illuminations. No messages to guide from the gray into the sun. I think, *I got nothing*.

Having nothing isn't bad, though. Really, life is much simpler. You have no worries about the complex entanglements of daily living. No worries about cash, bills or anything else. Aside from meeting basic needs—which of course would be a worry if we couldn't—life would be simple. Sell pencils on the beach or something. I think it's the Parrot Head mentality. John Lennon wrote about it in Watching the Wheels, too. But somehow we feel that we all have to have something.

But we all have something. Most of us have food on our tables, a roof over our head, and some means of paying some of our bills. For readers of my blog, most are at least affluent enough to have a PC and internet access. We have many who care, and many we care about. We have the ability to love and be loved. We are loved by some higher power. Of course, this is the greatest of these things.

Today I will be grateful for having something. It may not be what I think I want but it is surely what I need.

Overflowing

I don't know how they could miss it. It was clearly full—well, over full, really. I had spilled my morning coffee and made a mess. I used a half a roll of paper towels. That, coupled with the debris of the day, definitely meant the trash needed to be emptied. Of course the maid was supposed to do it but apparently she forgot. I'd do it myself but I didn't know where the dumpster was for the hotel.

I was never good at taking out the trash. It seems I always forgot. I actually had extra trash cans so I could get through two weeks. Sometimes the pile got quite high. When my son was a teen I was able to get him to do it. Sadly, that only lasted a little while and then the charm wore off. No matter, the ex was good at it too.

Sometimes we forget how much trash we accumulate. It builds up in our minds and souls 'til it is overflowing. Try as we might to get others to take it out, it's really something we have to do for ourselves. There are things that we need to hold onto, but most of the time it's just a bunch of rubbish.

As a therapist, it seems I am continually guiding people to the dumpster. People want to hold onto things long after they should. After a while, it can be overwhelming for them. Best to get rid of it as it accumulates.

Forgive, forget, and move on.

Carpe diem

Glamorous? Well not really. I talk to people all the time about my job and spin stories of adventure and globetrotting. My job has enabled me to see things that I would never have seen for sure. Hawaii, Alaska, Europe are all very exciting. It has been a great job on that basis. Of course, there are some not so fun places tossed in, but all in all, it's been a great job.

But there are many disadvantages too. A hotel room is a hotel room, whether it is in Frankfurt or Watertown. Seems that although you get used to it, kind of, you're always struggling to get the mundane done. Where to shop, how to cook—the current room has two old, beat-up pots. I need to get to the dentist and that's hit or miss. I want to find a yoga studio and a chiropractor. Last haircut I got in CA was just a cut above a flowbee. Phone books don't even exist anymore. I do use the internet but that's only so-so. It gets frustrating and old. I still have more than two months to go, too.

Although home is relative, it's still nice to be home and sleep in your own bed, surrounded by what's familiar. To see familiar faces and places. It's just comforting. Being only 12 hours away from home opens up the possibility, but not for a two-day weekend. Aside from the creature comforts, relationships are the worst away from home. Hard to get to know folks in just a few weeks, and even harder to sustain relationships from afar. There is comfort in my electronic friends but nothing beats a real hug.

Does it balance? Eh, some days not so much. But we soldier on and look for rainbows. A positive outlook goes far. The scales will tip and come back into balance. They always do. Things happen for a reason.

Carpe Diem - Seize the Day!

Over the hill

The black balloon, one of those Mylar types, was taped to her desk. It was clear that she was having a birthday. Notice I didn't say celebrating as it appears that her friends thought it was pretty funny to tease her about turning 50. There was "over-the-hill" stuff all over her desk.

It's interesting that we think that 50 is over the hill. Not many of us will live to 100 so really, the midpoint is somewhere between 35 and 40. Yet we don't think that way. Somehow, 50 is the magic number. Apparently, we spend our days climbing the hill until we get to 50 to get over the hill. Perhaps it's then we are supposed to throw our hands in the air, like on a roller coaster, and scream all the way down.

It seems that we are always climbing hills, or trying to get out of those life valleys. Really, the time we spend at the summit is usually just brief. It takes way longer to get up the hill than to get down. Just ask any mountain climber. In fact, going downhill seems to have mixed emotions. We aren't supposed to go downhill too fast because that is a bad thing right? Of course, skiers live for the downhill.

For me, I am not sure I'll ever reach the peak. It seems that things always seem to be uphill. Just when I get up to the top, it's time to deal with reality and down I plunge. Back into the foothills where I seem to spend the majority of the time. But for me, the path to the top is always more adventurous than the quick trip down.

I think that perhaps if we stayed at the top, it would just be a new plateau anyway. At least that's what I tell myself. Maybe it's best to think of life as a gradual incline. Slow and steady, we keep moving upwards. Fewer cliffs to be aware of.

I am not sure I'll ever get over the hill. I always want to see what is over the one after that anyway. More adventures await!

Got time?

The damn alarm on the phone keeps going off. Someday I'll take the time to figure it out. It is helpful to know what is on your schedule, and mine was packed this week. Seemed like every 20 minutes or so my pocket was vibrating with another notice of where I was supposed to be and who I was supposed to be talking to. We even have meetings to plan meetings to plan tasks for the next meeting. Even if there isn't a scheduled meeting, we are thinking about the next tasks and accomplishment.

None of us like meetings, and I am not really sure why. In some settings, they are the only way to communicate. But some of those are god-awful meetings, that seem to go forever, are mind-numbing. I confess that frequently I struggle to stay awake. Thankfully, my colleague nudged me the other day before I started to snore - that would be bad. In the military, you are supposed to stand up to keep yourself from nodding off. I went into one death by PowerPoint meeting the other day and half the room was standing up. You'd think the presenter would get a clue, but they droned on and on.

Yesterday, I was so scheduled that I think I should have scheduled a time to pee, it was that bad. I started out at 6:30am and didn't get home till after 8:00pm. Next week I have two presentations to do at zero dark thirty—literally hours before sunrise. I am not sure how I can even fit in another meeting.

It is important to take time to communicate though, whether it is with your colleagues or your family. I frequently prescribe "meetings" for families that are struggling. A scheduled time to talk about challenges or time for each other. The power of the schedule will make it happen. And if you prepare

for "the meeting," you can actually say what you need to say without the hurried, unfiltered and occasionally hurtful communication we blurt out on the run.

Of course, we need to make sure our first meeting of the day and the last one at night is with our God. It is only through him that everything else is possible. Even if it's not Sunday, put it on your schedule. He's always available and wants to talk. The answers may not come through your iPhone or Blackberry, but just as sure, they are there.

Why is it so hard to love?

One of the hardest parts of my profession is helping people to love. In fact, it may be at the core of most issues. That primal sense that we need to care and to be cared about. To belong to someone or something. It drives much of what we do. If you think about popular music, isn't most of it about being in love or heartbreak? You would think that every possible emotion has been sung about right?

Yet in helping people to love, clinicians end up helping people expose every possible raw nerve to help to reframe or sooth the pain. As giving people, we want to give. And give we do (or I do), to try and help. My thoughts seem to be always of others. How can I help them? And for many clients, we do. But it leaves you emotionally drained and in some ways vulnerable. We are supposed to have clear, established boundaries but we still care. I think that's what differentiates the good clinician from the mediocre.

Yet on a personal basis, it seems that the more I give, the more people take. Then when you ask for anything back, they can't or won't provide anything back. Perhaps I just attract needy people. Each and every time I find I get hurt deeper. Funny when you put others first, you always end up last.

Everyone wants you to help them feel better—and assume your armor is strong. And most of the time it is. But even Superman was vulnerable to kryptonite and I am not Superman.

Perhaps Paul got it right in his letter to the Corinthians?

> ...If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic

> powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 1-8, 13)

And yet I remain caring, compassionate, giving - and very much alone.

A simple life

He missed his tractor. I had befriended a guy at the hotel who seemed to be always downstairs. He was here on a contract to do some electrical work or something like that. It sounds like hard work. He spoke with a quick southern draw and sometimes he was hard to understand. Normally, I wouldn't even have given him a second glance. But he was a bit chatty and always struck up a conversation. He was a smoking buddy.

He was quite colorful, or at least his language was. Sprinkled with expletives, but he never seemed to be angry. Actually, he was a bit soft-spoken. He had a belly way over his belt. And an ever-present cigarette or beer in his hand. He was with a bunch of hard partying construction type guys but he said that's not really his thing. He talked of his experience in the bars like something he endured rather than enjoyed. This is, by far, the farthest away from home he has ever been, and for two months too.

What struck me was his sense of happiness. He missed his "momma" (aka his wife) and dreamed of the simplest things. Amazed by my iPad, he said he's never been "much into that computer stuff." He tells me that he lives in a one stoplight town and it just flashes. His favorite minister passed a few years ago and they just can't seem to find a new one.

Most of all, he just wanted to go home. Back to his hobby farm, back to his grandkids, back to the calmness of his world. The money he makes here will let him plant for the year, and if he's lucky, fix his fishing skiff.

He was very contented as he reminisced. He didn't long for things he didn't have or crave the fast lane even a bit. He was happy with the simple and sure

things in life. Brian dreams of winter wheat and the touch of his wife. Of the church bell in town and his simple friends.

Home. Simple, easy, and content. Although it seemed he didn't have much money, he was a very rich man indeed.

Yet again

Okay, so I am a sap. I think perhaps that's why I do what I do. I look at the stoic and think, how can they be so cold-hearted. Stone-faced and unemotional. I wonder if they are emotionless on the inside and out. Regardless, there doesn't appear to be any sign of emotion.

Of course, men are raised to suppress their emotions. It is a sign of weakness I hear. But yet when I hear of sad thing, a tear always comes to my eye. No, not a river but at least a little misty. I think they call that accurate empathy. Sometimes with clients, it's hard to maintain composure. Today, I think I have been pretty successful but it doesn't mean the emotions aren't there.

Sometimes things tear at our heart, whether it is the shooting in Colorado or just a simple sad comment. We empathetically process it trying to make sense of the emotion. Sadly, sometimes things just don't make sense. I think that these are the hardest times. Yet it is important to turn this energy from pain and self-pity to something productive. If we can use it to draw strength, rather than anger and sadness, we will have become stronger.

It's no wonder that tear and tear have the same meaning, just a little different emphasis.

Inside out

It was kind of dark out and I wasn't paying attention. No matter, I know how to get dressed—done it a million times. It was going to be a crazy one. Another day chock full of stuff to get done. Seems that ten hour days are the norm on this rotation. I was glancing at the calendar thinking about how to be everywhere at once and I guess the time got away. A bit late now, so I quickly rushed to get ready and out the door. Something we all do every day.

Exhausted, I got home after dinner and changed. Funny, my white undershirt was on inside out. No, it was under a button down, so I didn't look like a dork all day. But the tag was on the outside. I smiled as I changed. Not a big deal. I have worn two different socks before and, believe it or not, two different shoes.

We all think, or so it seems, that what's on the inside counts. But few of us would dare to be inside out to the world. We look for people who can see what's on the inside but we hide ours under layers of other protective, colorful stuff. We want to appear to be one of the beautiful people, without scars or love handles. But we all have them and secretly wish that people can see the true "us." If we were more inside out, we wouldn't have to posture quite as much. We are just not ready to be that vulnerable.

Perhaps we need personal tags on our outsides with care instructions.

The power of two

The past few days have been long and hard. I have been keeping my head down, nose to the grindstone and moving through. It's a good thing though; I have been a bit sad, with my head hanging low looking down. Interesting, there has been a bit of luck on the way. Yesterday, walking back to my hotel, I found two bucks in the parking lot. My lucky day I thought! Later, I found two shiny dimes on the beach and even two cents on the patio that someone wanted to give me. $2.22—quite the haul. Of course, most of what I did yesterday was teaching resilience for the "Triple Deuce" battalion at the installation. That's a lot of twos—good thing I am not that superstitious.

There is some folk wisdom that things come in threes—both good and bad. I am not sure of the origin but I have heard it many times. Three strikes and you're out in baseball, but in bowling, three strikes is a much sought after turkey. There isn't much about twos except perhaps in "Go Fish" or amateur poker when they are wild.

One of the basic needs we have though is to be loved. To find that special someone that we can share our world with. It seems to be a basic Maslovian quest for belonging. We spend our days enjoying the love of our significant other, knowing that the power of two will somehow make things right in our world. We draw from the deck or fish pond looking for that match, somehow hoping that there will be a pair—a perfect match. Than we win right?

But many of us have had that seemingly perfect pair that turned out not to be so perfect. Most of my clients want to give me their two cents about problems with their pair. Add to that my two bits and I'd soon have change for a buck.

But compromise and loose change do add up. Although $2.22 might not buy much from the value menu, it certainly makes us richer for the experience. Perhaps if we keep looking, even when your head is down, maybe you still can get lucky.

I think I'll go buy two lottery tickets—maybe I'll win two million.

Boxed in

Seventy-two miles per hour, I was sailing along. Finally out of the construction nightmare that had trapped my open road spirit for seemingly eons. Traffic was humming along, but still quite heavy. Everybody was keeping pace. My exit should be coming up. And then.... Damn! Sailed right by it. Missed the sign, I was surrounded by 18 wheelers. And I was in the wrong lane anyway.

Oftentimes we travel at high speed, almost oblivious to what's going on around us. Even though we look for signs of where to go, we miss them because we can't see around obstacles that are in our way. We sail along blissfully, excited to be moving again after orange cone nightmares that we endure. And just like that, we miss things that are important. Perhaps we should slow down and not be in such a hurry to get where we think we ought to be.

Take time to decelerate. Whatever was meant to be will still be there when you get there in your own time.

Screwed

Its head was popping up. I am sure that if I had a tool, one good twist of the wrist would fix it. And there were dozens of them. Of course, I have no interest in fixing all of them. Besides they all have one of those funny proprietary heads that need a special tool. Even if I had my tool box, I don't think that I have the right tool.

I don't mind buying tools; you never know what you might need. But these single use tools tend to just clutter up the tool box. Still, I imagine the aisle at Home Depot and know exactly where to find it, if it exists.

Emotionally, I have many tools in my tool box. Things that I used to use every day, or just for special projects. I might have something that will work. I just need to dig around a bit. Maybe that all in one bit set I bought might have something. Still, I am nowhere near my tools and really, what the heck do I care if there is a screw loose?

Sometimes clients quip that they have a screw loose and that's why they come to see me. They wander around the aisles, looking for a perfect solution or the right tool. As a therapist, one of my tasks is to help people root around in their tool box to find solutions. Most of the time they have the right tools, even if they aren't perfect.

If you just put your mind to the problem, there probably is something in your tool box that will work. If we stop looking for perfection and think outside of the box, there may be things that you can try that will impact the challenge.

Heck, McGyver always found a way.

Toil and trouble

I like bubbles! They make me happy. Whether they are in my champagne or floating off my soap bubble wand. Each unique, they float iridescently catching the gentle breeze. Small or large, they float aimlessly hoping to stay aloft and avoid collisions. More fragile than the finest crystal, they contain potential—at least for the fleeting moments they float. Try to catch them and they are gone, a small splash of dampness is all that remains.

Some of our dreams are like bubbles, inflating on a moment to quickly disappear in a tear. Shakespeare's witches brew was full of dark incantations, designed to deny happiness to Macbeth. Tragic in the end, the spell seemed to have worked better than any J.K. Rowling fantasy.

Bubbles will continue to make me happy, though. My dreams may be fleeting but some days they keep me afloat. Maybe someday my dreams will come true. Until then, I will blow softly and try to avoid collisions with reality.

Balance

I know I am kind of klutzy, especially when I don't sleep well. I guess I was a bit over enthusiastic with the shampoo bottle in the shower and squirted too much. Whoops! I lost my footing and had to grab madly for stability. Good thing my elbow found the wall and I grabbed the curtain. Ouch! Still, better than cracking my head or a rib on the tub. I almost fell the other day too. This time in the mud. I wasn't looking where I was going and slipped. No damage except a really muddy shoe. Easily fixed with a stick and a damp cloth. I am hoping that these things don't come in threes.

It is difficult to maintain balance in your life. Many times we get lost in the "gotta's"—things that you gotta do. We end up running rampant with responsibilities, chores, and tasks. Lots to get done today. Although occasionally you feel a great sense of achievement, most days you're just exhausted. I think that even my "Want to" list is full.

As a therapist, I tend to fall off the balance wire. My "gotta's" and "want tos" seem to always be related to others. I always give of my time, my knowledge, my money, and my caring. I spend my days thinking how best to help whomever I run across—from colleagues to clients. Heck, I even try to help the strangers I meet out in the world. I'm always quick with a witty comment or a lunge to open the door. I think I respond to every request for funds that I receive from friends, and even if they don't ask, I am quick to offer.

Of course, true relationships are never balanced 50/50. There are times when they need to be 90/10. However, in order for it to be a true relationship, it needs to be 10/90 sometimes too. But sometimes it is hard to

keep your balance, especially when you're falling. We grasp for support anywhere we can find it—and sometimes we get hurt. Some days I come back to my empty condo or hotel room and ponder the 10/90. I wonder if I could even do it—just let someone take care of me. Probably not. I am just too giving to ever let it be that unbalanced. I'd just give more back. Maybe that is the eternal quest for love?

Maybe that would be 50/50? I like the odds and will keep taking that bet.

Once and again

It was hundreds of years old but still majestic. It had probably fallen a hundred years before I was born. Its trunk was easily six feet in circumference. Bathed in soft rays, the green and brown lichen made it a beautiful blanket. Although its roots were no longer planted, it still breathed life into the forest. Dozens of dragonflys and insects hovered, sipping early morning moisture from the dawn's dew. Covered in mushrooms, it was a veritable garden cornucopia of sustenance for a host of wildlife, seen and unseen.

In life, its canopy provided shelter from the storms and homes for friends. In death, its roots and branch remnants were teaming with shadows, making curious nooks and crannies for small, timid creatures taking shelter from the steamy morning sun. It no longer feared the storm that may have toppled it having survived decades ago. Although decayed, it was still formidable. Its massive trunk still sprawled dozens of feet on the forest floor. It would not easily give up its ground. It still had purpose.

Our purpose is not always apparent. We think we must plant mighty roots and reach to the sky to achieve greatness. The mighty oak thought not of its purpose, it just lived its life to the fullest. We'll never know how high it reached but surely it is still providing life for those around it. Our greatness is better defined by those we touch rather than our own meager accomplishments. And even when our reaching is done, our words and deeds will continue to provide comfort and direction to those we touch.

Itch

The dream was confusing, as they often are. Still, I was anxiously awaiting the next event when a sense of urgency seemed to appear. It made it even more confusing. Kind of the "huh what?" experience. I had to, I just had to. I woke with a start to find a demanding itch. Something must have bitten me— bastard! I scratched urgently to find a nice raised red mark on my uncovered thigh. Red marks and a little blood even, it was a pretty urgent itch. Bet I was even scratching it in my sleep.

We know our mind continues to work, even when we sleep. Challenges and problems of the days past continue to spin on the ole treadmill in the back of our mind. Sleep really just shuts off the light but the wheel keeps spinning. Sometimes I awake with new thoughts and solutions to yesterday's challenges. I always wake like a light switch—instantly on, no matter the time of day or night. Thankfully, all of my awakenings aren't the startled urgent kind.

But sometimes we have to wake up with a sense of urgency. I am not talking about the mosquito or I got to pee kind, but the motivating itch, "it's time for action" kind. Perhaps we should pay attention to our better impulses rather than wash them away with a cup of coffee?

Sometimes you just have to scratch where it itches.

Rolling

It was stuck, not all the way but depending on which way I tried to move, it just hung up. Of course, the chair would freeze in place and a jarring jerk would ensue. But just a minor shift and it would roll free again. Every time it happened I would think, I need to flip this thing over and see what is stuck in it. But since it was just a momentary annoyance, I never seemed to get around to it.

It's just how I roll, I think. Most of the time things are smooth and steady forward. It really doesn't take much effort. Just lean forward into it a bit and off you go. I have never ridden a Segway but I hear that's the entire control mechanism. The more you lean, the faster you go.

Sometimes things get in the way. Not big things usually, those we really have to stop and deal with. Like when a wheel falls off. But other times, the wheels just hitch a bit. A quick shift and they are free rolling again. Our thoughts are like that too. If we try and think differently, at least for a minute, sometimes you can get around being stuck. That's the power of positive thinking.

Try it, and maybe you can keep rolling....

Passing

They speed by. Or actually, I speed by. Most of the time you don't even notice them, except on long journeys. They are just little signs planted on the shoulders. Sometimes they are just plain green rectangles, other times they hold information about where you are or where you are going. At 60, they go by at a mile a minute. But who drives 60? If you try and look at them, you need to focus on something other than the road ahead. I am so ADHD that even when I do try, I miss them. But I think on all but the winding country roads, all interstates have mile markers.

Our lives pass us by at alarming speed. Each moment a marker for where we are. But as soon as you look, the moment is gone and the next one is about to pass. Sure, we should slow down and pay attention to these moments. But it is hard to slow down enough to see them. You become a traffic hazard. But with each there is information. How far to the next stop or highlighting the path that we are on. We can live our entire lives without ever paying attention to them, but they are there nonetheless. Birthdays, graduations, marriages, death and miles of other things in our past. All come by too fast. And in a moment they are gone.

But with each passing moment we get farther down the road to what will be. Much of it we can't control at the speed we must travel. We really can't completely stop. Life happens. But perhaps if we slowed down a little, some of the moments might be mere revealing. Reflecting on our past is important as we plan our ongoing journey. But there is no future in the past. What's passed is past and not a moment we can change.

Best to keep your eyes on the road ahead and avoid hazards.

Higher

It seemed like there were a hundred of them. A moving black cloud as they descended upon a lone tree. It must have had some fruit or something on it. Although I was more than ten stories up, you could still detect movement in the tree, almost as if it was alive. Kind of a shimmering quality.

We were watching at sunset from a rooftop bar, overlooking the Potomac. As it faded from yellow gold to reddish umber, the birds began to move. In ones and twos, they flew to the top of the building next door. Over the course of a few minutes, the entire flock had moved to the roof top. In another few moments, they began to migrate to another building, this time a little higher. But they did not rest there for long; they flew up to the roof of our still taller building and were lost to the darkness.

They must be chasing the sun I thought. Somehow they thought that by getting higher they could savor the last moments of the day. Always reaching higher to try and find something that really isn't achievable. Yet still they seem to try every day.

Many of us reach to the Son for our answers. At times we may fall short and find ourselves in darkness, chasing what may seem like futility. But each day dawns anew. Grace and faith will help us to fly higher to get moments in his light. Our thoughts, acts and prayers lift us up to be closer to his love.

Red glare

I usually remember, but last night I forgot to draw the curtains. I usually wake up early and this morning was no exception. Zero dark thirty comes at the same time every day. The black turned to grey and from soft to hard, and light filled the room. Today, it was especially red and screaming in my eyes. I rolled over for a few minutes and the light softened to dawn's early light.

Many times we forget about important things in our world. We pray daily and seek guidance for our own world. But there are other things that we owe our gratitude to. In Arlington over the weekend, I thought of all of the servicemen in their final formation, headstones that seemed to travel acres. They did not roll over from the glare; they stood up for what was asked of them. Perhaps they saw the red glare of weapons or explosions as they made the ultimate sacrifice to enable our liberties and freedom. To allow us to rant in Social Media, be haters or godly, or even get up in the morning free from oppression. And there are hundreds of thousands that do this every day. They ask not, they just do.

As the red sky faded to clear blue the words of Francis Scott Key seem to echo, by the dawn's early light. We are all stripes on the flag, each being part of the fabric of our country. True, there are stars and blue skies, but it is only when we are together that we are great. Each doing our part to help each other, to make our world a better place.

I am proud to be an American.

Tempest fugit

The movie tone calendar rips off the sepia colored days, clicking with that old-time sound. Days and years seem to pass as fast as seconds when you are lost in melancholy. It seems like it was just yesterday, but all the days past are yesterday. Yesterday, I walked by a desk in one of the shops and saw a calendar on the wall covered with red X's marching down the page to some unknown destiny. Really, can it be another year has flown by?

Tempus fugit, right? But not all time flies (or "flees," as it translates). Sometimes those past flashbulb moments are as rich as if they are happening right now. Times of love, sorrow, or suspense seem to etch themselves in our consciousness. We savor the good and thankfully forget most of the rest. What a burden it would be to have a perfect memory. Of course, there are days that are prescribed to be happy: birthdays, holidays, and vacation days. People even remind us, as if we might forget: "Have a happy… or merry…" they say. Shouldn't we try and be happy every day?

Other days we are supposed to be sad, like anniversaries of deaths, 9/11, D-Day or other national holidays. But each of those days also changed our world, perhaps even more than the happy ones. Sure we should remember, but not be harnessed by the past.

Each day is new and holds the same promise—whether it's your birthday, a national memorial day, or just a Tuesday. Our wishes for the past to be different are impossible to fulfill, but our wishes for our tomorrows are eternally full of promise.

So what is love?

So of course that is a question that probably has been asked since the dawn of time.

Is it 1:Corinthians 13? Is it a sonnet by Barrett Browning? Is it just plain ole secure place in attachment theory of Bowlby and Ainsworth? How about the work of Robert Sternberg?

Is it all of this? Of course it is. And more. There are different kinds of love. And yes, I refer to everything from the love of friends, spouses and strangers. It seems to me that love changes constantly. Sometimes it's romantic, sometime just being there, sometimes life enriching sometimes life threatening.

Yet for me it breaks down to three things—two of them are identical. First and second, love is unconditional between two people. Exactly as you are, period. It can't be if you are only different (i.e., thinner, sweeter, more thoughtful, or whatever.) Some say that that isn't possible. I am not sure. Yet, I know it must be.

Third, and most important, love is a verb. We need to change it into an active act to be fulfilling. I can love my job, my car or my socks but am not "in" love with them. It's different when it relates to people. Yes love can be quiet or dormant. Perhaps much love is quiet. Yet for it to be the sound in a silent forest, it needs to be seen, heard and felt.

People have to be willing, at least sometimes, to put aside "Their Stuff" for the other persons "Stuff." At least sometimes, you have to be number 1 on each other's list. Not all the time mind you, you have to take some time for yourself. But really, too much self-time is... well, selfish.

We are not perfect beings in any way. That is the "human" in us. Sure we get angry and wounded sometimes, and circle the wagons to protect our delicate ID, as our Psychoanalytic friends would think. Yet we need to strike a balance I challenge any of you constant readers to contradict this... and some have in the past. But mostly, they add things to the list. Like trust, commitment and so forth. But yet, they are all encompassed, in my mind, in the word "unconditional."

To borrow on the word, love is U-shaped. It starts out at the top of the U with romance, flowers and sweet nothings. Then it slides down the arm of reality to the bottom of the U. This is where many find apathy, mundane, or in the worst case, desperation and divorce. In order for a relationship to be stronger, you have to climb back up the steep other side. It is a difficult apex to climb. Yet when you get there, you are in a different place than where you began but just as high. I think it is a lonely climb but one that all relationships must endure.

So as I ponder poetic words and biblical quotes, I think love isn't just words or thoughts... it is a state of being. Perhaps that is what we find in the unconditional love of our God. Grace. Being loved even if you haven't earned it. Unconditionally. Perhaps that is where we find our faith, rather than on bended knee. It's what we do when we stand up that is just as important.

To get to that, we have to forgive. And frankly, we stink at that. Each day many of us pray for that. To be better people, to be more loving, etc. Yet we have to keep praying because we keep screwing up. I don't like the concept of sin, but really that is what the church calls it. Too moralistic for me. I prefer to think of it as critical self-reflection. Perhaps it is the goal of therapy for many to reach that insight.

Earworms

It was a fabulous dream full of rich colors, confusing images and meaningful representations, one of those euphoric ones that leaves me wanting more, just five more minutes... As the haze clears fragments remain, a snippet, just a few notes of some haunting melody. Quickly your mind traces the pathways to meaning. Why this? Why now?

We all seem to get haunted by earwigs—fragments of tunes long forgotten that seemingly have no connection to why they remain stuck in our forebrain. For some, it is an annoying tune that they actively try and suppress to no avail. For others, it is a melody of a time gone past and memories. Psychoanalytic theory would hasten down a path that sought to connect meaning. Some Id or superego message that was trying to reach consciousness. Yet somehow that just doesn't fit. Yet the song remains, fragmented and pulsing.

Sometimes my earworms are non-musical snippets, thoughts of how to remember or resolve some important event of daily life. Mere fleeting thoughts? Hard to say when they seem almost Obsessive Compulsive. Freud would have a field day. Most have voice, rather than text. Your mother's admonitions, a lover's breathless whisper or just a childhood giggle, somehow unwelcomely intruding into our conscious. They seem urgent yet unimportant. Omnipresent soundtracks.

I guess I should just be grateful that mine today isn't some wretched 70's disco tune.

Still looking up

Chin up—head to the front of the room, the Yogi demanded. Yet another seemingly impossible pretzel pose. Eyes forward. It seems that once again I need to look up and open my posture. Don't forget to breathe. Weirdly enough, I need that advice.

It seems that people have been telling me to look up forever. I used to be even clumsier than I am now. I was always watching the ground, looking for things or money to scavenge. Head over heels, I'd tumble to more bloody knees and Band-Aids. The admonitions continued as I got older and ran my bike into parked cars and stumbled into other inanimate objects. I had a season pass to the emergency room.

Many of us still look down too often. We cast our gaze down on people, things or in dejection. When we are crestfallen, sad or lonely, our chins drag on the ground. Our whole posture seems to slouch, Eeyore-like. Pessimism wins too often. Woe is me.

And yet we do look up. To people we admire, to the future. We look up to the summits we want to scale, from the 14'ers in Colorado and the life goals. Up, courageous and unafraid. Look up, our friends chide.

On this Easter morn, I too look up. I look up to the mysteries of my faith. He is risen! Although bowed in supplication, I hold my gaze forward as I am thankful for all of my blessings. Still looking up... Seeking the solace from prayer as much as yoga.

Positive things happen to positive people. Look up in faith, look forward to your future. And remember to breathe!

Ugly people

Beautiful people... we were surrounded by a whole bar of people trying to look their best. It didn't matter if they were young or old, chubby or skinny. Of course they were, it was Saturday night. So I wondered out loud to my friend, who is the ugliest person here? An interesting thought. Of course, she looked at me like I was nuts—a look I am very familiar with. Amused, we looked around and decided that one guy was a bit creepy looking, but not really ugly.

Most of the time we think about beauty. We try to impress those around us with the latest fashions, hair styles, and for women, the inevitable cosmetics. We try to be up on the latest news, gossip and trends on Twitter so if we can find an opportunity, we can demonstrate how beautiful and knowledgeable we are. For the shallow, this is their entire existence. For the rest of us, it's what we do to try and fit in.

But what about the ugly people? If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so must ugly be. Interestingly, we didn't really see anyone we thought was ugly—well at least superficially. You see that eye of the beholder can be easily fooled. It is easy to put on a face, the right clothes etc., and still be hiding ugly. We shy away from those that we are not physically attracted to—or at least untill we get to know them. Anyone who has ever been on a dating website knows this. We all seem to say that it's what's on the inside that counts. But at least initially we don't think this. We pre-judge based on appearance. It's almost that we have to overcome our physical eye of the beholder prejudices.

I have been fooled many times in my life, but really I am not a fool. Sometimes we blindly trust the outward beauty of someone only to learn

that they really are ugly. Perhaps we were seduced by their physical attributes, smooth tongue, or our own desires to be one of the included. The inner circle of privileged people. Only to discover that they really are ugly in the eyes of my heart. In that, I trust.

What did I learn? Well I have never been attracted to the playboy model type anyway (Well, maybe when I was 13 and had one under my mattress.) I prefer real people. Real beauty comes from the inside and glows outward.

Can ugly people really be beautiful? Sure... and so can anyone.

Rattle and hum

Squeak, chirp, and annoy. There is this sound coming out of my car that is really frustrating me. It's kind of more like a squeak. Like a mouse getting squeezed. Eeek. Of course, as you're driving, there is no way to isolate it. Not that the car was going to fall apart, but really just an ongoing annoyance. It stays in the background and just kind of hovers, coming in and out of focus. Not enough to really worry about but just enough to annoy. It's making me little nuts, well nuttier anyway. Bump, squeak, eeek. Argh...

Sometimes we have things that rattle around in our head. Thought fragments that just always seem to be there, just out of focus. They squeak unexpected and kind of disappear from focus when you try and find them. Perhaps when we were new, they weren't there. But life's pot holes have shaken something loose. Not enough to be Obsessive Compulsive, but annoying none-the-less. Try as we might, they are difficult to stop.

If we can find it, terrific. By all means pay attention to it and make it go away. If it's that forgotten word or task... get it done. If it's your compass trying to guide you, reset your direction. But if, after a while, it it's still there and you're sure that it's not going away, change you focus. It may be something that will always be there. We all have stuff that just rattles around and can annoy us. Just don't dwell on it.

Turn up the radio and keep cruising.

Splish splash

Splosh, all over my clothes and the floor. Usually I am careful, stepping gingerly as I study the motion in the cup, making sure I pause to let it settle before proceeding. Let the coffee find its level. But today, I was a bit distracted and… It was kind of tragic. I could almost taste it but it was not to be. Wiping up the mess, I silently curse my stupidity.

We've all done it—overfilled our cup and then tried to move so carefully as to not spill. If we can just get a little off the top, we can make it. But it's too hot to really drink yet. We try to take a little sip and keep moving. Sometimes it works and other times… dribble and waterfalls. Frustrating.

In life, there are times when our cup is full and we become distracted. Many things seem to happen all at once and before we notice, we are filled to the rim with hot stuff. We try and multitask and think we can handle it—we've done it before… It's hardly worth our attention. And then… splash! What a mess.

Really, it doesn't take much to avoid the dribble and spill. Stop; let the world come to a rest and cool off for a few minutes. Breathe. Take a sip or two and reassess. It's the best way to avoid dribbles and crisis.

Half open

My bedroom gets hot at night. My condo is on the third and fourth floor, over a downtown business, overlooking downtown. A sweeping vista of the historic North Church. If I lean precariously, I can see the Piscataqua River. I just love the location—it's perfect to experience all that the town has to offer. But it gets inferno hot, especially at night. Even though it's a corner unit, it gets no breeze.

Of course, I could open the window wide. Let that fresh air in and cool off. But there are no eaves on the condo and I am subject to the elements. If it's storming, the rain gets in. The weather here is unpredictable so you never know what's going to happen. So really, I can't just leave them wide open. I end up worrying that the carpet and curtains will get wet. Been there, got the wet towels to prove it. So it's sweat or worry.

The solution is to leave the windows half open. It captures a faint breeze and provides some relief. Open enough to catch the wind but not really enough to get too wet if it rains. If it's really warm, I'll run the fan to boost the breeze to get relief. The cool air feels wonderful.

We worry that if we are too emotionally open, we will be too exposed to hurt. We are afraid of what might happen if we let too much in. We close our hearts and minds to possibilities and sweat it out, thinking it's the only safe choice. Protect us from things that might produce tears.

But what if we opened it just a bit? Chose to share and be just a little uncomfortable. Perhaps seek inspiration from something that might offer a small breeze... like a fan in the window or a meditation. Be at least

slightly open to things that might change our world. It's refreshing and elegantly simple.

Sure, there is a chance we might shed a tear, but we will dry—it's only water.

By 'know' stretch

Today my body aches. In places where I didn't even know I could ache. I worked out hard yesterday and the butt kicks we did in warmup really did kick mine. Burpees are more than the 7-11 kind from a big gulp. Although it felt good then, kind of, not so much this morning. Ah to be 21 again where nothing hurt in the morning, except maybe my hung-over head. But that's probably the only reason I'd want to be 21 again. Even if it hurts to sit.

Stretching is the key. Warm up those muscles before you work out. Twisting and turning to gain flexibility. Deliberate but definite stretches, to get ready to exercise. Of course, you have to stretch when you're done too, just to cool down. This is all basic kinesiology that instructors know and torture us with as we unhappily sweat. It makes for a safe and productive routine. But I must not have done a good job yesterday since I'm pretty sore today.

We assume that if we just do the same routine, that everything will be exactly as we want it and we'll achieve our desired results. Everything will be just as it should be. And we'll be emotionally fit. But of course, it doesn't and we are sore at the world.

Imagination allows us to take in those new experiences. Stretching to encompass the possibilities allows us to consider the "land of what if" while avoiding the delusions of a perfect world or workout. Stretching our imagination allows us to not get bent out of shape as we experience the challenges of new routines. Without it, we will be sore and stiff and fail to achieve our fitness or life goals. Not the way I want to be this morning.

So today I will stretch it out, reach for the Bengay and try again. The soreness will go away but the results are always on the horizon.

Bridges

They closed one of the bridges to Maine quite unexpectedly the week I arrived in Portsmouth. It was projected to cost more to repair the WWII era bridge than to replace it. There are two other bridges here that cross the Piscataqua, not even a mile apart from the closed bridge. The turnpike or "Big Bridge" carries I95 and the twin to the closed Memorial Bridge, the Sarah Long. Both do the job of getting you to Kittery, Maine.

It was a bit confusing as a new resident to know which bridge to take. Although they all crossed the river, each had their own character and slightly different destination. They all crossed the mighty river that seemed nearly uncrossable as you stand on the shore. But really, they all ended up in the same place. Make a left or right at the end and you can easily find where you're going.

We have many bridges to cross in life. If you stand on one cliffside dreaming of the other, you'll never get there. There is risk, but you can't cross in two leaps. You need to figure out a way to get to the other side. You may have to readjust course when you get there but in the end, you'll be one step closer to your destination.

The space between

Of course, whenever I drop something it ends up in the worst possible place. I was cleaning up and my favorite knife fell right in the gap between the refrigerator and the counter. Damn! If it was something else I might have shrugged and kept going, but it was my favorite. Try as I might, using a coat hanger and everything, it was stuck. It landed point down and was embedded in the floor. And since the fridge is so tight against the counter, it was an ordeal. I found all kinds of crud and grime and even an old fork that wasn't even mine.

Thoughts and words are like that, too. Sometimes they just slip where you don't want them. Like a Freudian slip, when you say something but you are really talking about your mother. Words get in the way as we try to express our thoughts and feelings. They fill the space between the silence and the meaning. And like the knife, the thoughts and emotions could become stuck, point first, in something hard to reach.

One of the most powerful tools in therapy is measured silence, where we let that space between just fill with whatever might fall into it. Many times a client will find a message in that space without having to go rooting around to get it out. It might even result in the moving of the fridge to find some insight.

Rechargeable

The light dimmed and the phone powered down. A red X appeared across the screen when I tried to turn it back on. Damn, I forgot to plug it in and now it's dead. Somewhere, I have a quick charge battery that might enable me to make a call. Except, of course, I don't have it with me. I thought I had turned off all of those features that sucked the battery dry. Guess not. Now it is as useless until I find a power source to plug it in.

Seems that everything I need has a battery. Some are rechargeable—just plug in and the device will slowly begin to revive. As long as you have the time to wait. At the airport, the floor is littered with people monopolizing every available outlet. Trying to get a little boost before they board. Maybe not enough to get through the flight but every bit helps.

Recharging is as important in life. Many things drain our energy. We look to external sources to re-invigorate us when we are out of juice. Sometimes, a new set of batteries is all it takes. A quick smile, a kiss or a vacation and we get a spring back into our step. Sadly, like replaceables, that spring fades all too quickly.

Our hearts need internal, rechargeable batteries. We need to plug into something, or someone, that will produce that slow and steady charge that provides full bars of power. We look to our jobs, our relationships and passions for that external source for fulfillment. Although a quick charge might see us through, long-term we need something more.

Find and hold the things that give you power. Hold out for that slow and steady charge; it lasts longer and will ensure full functionality. In the meantime, stock up on the replacables that will empower you. You never know when you'll run out of juice.

It's a sign

I was only going one way, it just happened to be the wrong one. I quickly turned around and headed the other way. How could I have missed it? The arrow was as clear as day. All the cars pointed at me were my first clue. Guys hate turning around. I think it's genetic.

We are surrounded by signs. Most are carefully worded to provide guidance and direction. Left turn only, turn here, or the yellow caution ones that warn. Some command, like "do not enter!" and others merely suggest, like "curve ahead." They define what others expect or require us to do.

Other signs need to be interpreted, like a sign of your love or a sign from God. Nebulous things that have clear personal meanings but may be invisible to others. Outwardly expressing your inward thoughts and reinforcing what you already feel. It seems we can easily get lost in these as sometimes they are very confusing.

But as you sign on to your personal mission and life goals, the path is never clear. One sign points one way and another seems to command the opposite. We get lost in the aspiration and expectation, trying to safely navigate to our destination. There are wrong turns, dead ends, and the GPS snottily recalculates. But on we go, rarely turning around.

As we accelerate to merge onto the new route, we feel exhilaration as we leave the past behind in a cloud of dust. The upcoming road may have many curves but if you stay in control, you'll make it around the bend. It's okay to turn around if you're going the wrong way. Pay attention to the signs but navigate with your heart. Its true direction will always get you where you need to be.

Change

The jar was full. Over-full really, brimming with silver and copper coins from the past few months. I hate carrying loose change and every day toss everything from my pocket into a candy jar. It builds and collects representing fragments of past purchases. There is a certain satisfaction in watching it accumulate, even a bit thrilling as I toss a handful of quarters in. Big change, I think. But now I can barely fit another coin in.

Some change is good. It is extremely helpful when faced with a toll or a laundromat. But how much is enough? Should I grab a handful as I walk out? Will I need change today?

Life change can be difficult and overwhelming. Daily change accumulates fast. Although each handful in and of itself doesn't add up to much, when you accumulate too much you have to act to empty your jar. In counting it, you can take pride in your achievements. Although you may not know how much you have in there, when you look back you can see you changed a lot.

Each day brings changes. Overcoming your daily challenges will help you get a big payoff.

Dust jacket

It's really just for display, something to artistically fill the lobby. Dusty and worn, carefully strewn to create a scene of comfort and home. It was well-worn, tattered with a broken spine. It's gold-leaf, deckled edges made the pages easier to turn. The title faded from gold into black. It looks like it has been wet, as some of the pages seem a bit waterlogged. As I lift it, it falls open to a page and I begin to read. The characters seem familiar, a hero, a villain, a love interest... somewhat predictable I think.

Our lives have many chapters, each detailing our personal stories in our own prose. They seem predictable as we look back at them, tattered or gilded, as we were the main character. Some pages are dog-eared as we revisit them frequently—life lessons or mistakes; it's where the book falls open to. And some of the pages are even wet with tears of happiness or sorrow.

But with each new chapter we write, the adventure still unfolds. Although we may think it predictable, until we get to the end, we don't know. But the anticipation and excitement entices as we eagerly turn the pages. But most of our pages are blank until we fill them in, as our stories unfold every day.

I dust off my jacket and left the book where I found it, carefully closing it for now. I'll read today's chapter tomorrow. In the meantime, I need to push my pen for today's adventure.

Goes with

Leaning on the door, I stare blankly into the refrigerator. I've been on the road for a few weeks and am greeted by various foods of unnatural colors that I had the best of intentions of eating. I am afraid of many of them, as they now they look like middle school science experiments. I can only imagine what smells I'll be assaulted with as I clean them out. Seems I have quite the array of empty cold space and condiments. The freezer contains many beige and red frost covered lumps. Indistguishable and a little unappetizing. Still, there is a meal in here somewhere. Now if I just had something to go with, I'd be all set.

Sometimes we get lost in imagining what we can do, if only we had... something else to go with what we have. But our immediate hunger for nourishment leads us into the land of concoctions that might work but end up being a bit unusual. Like mustard pickles or stir fried peas. Filling but not very appetizing.

Oftentimes we have what it takes to feed our needs but we envision something grander—gourmet, even. We ferret around trying to think of what will go with what we already have. Most of the time it requires a bit of planning to get from the beige frozen lump to an elegant meal.

Perhaps the best strategy is to take a little time to plan. Sure, it might not come out gourmet but if we look at what we have, and get a few "go withs," we can create a nutritious meal. A quick trip to the grocery store, or even foraging on the web for recipes, and our end meal will be much more delectable.

Just a trim

It looks like he must have walked away in the middle of the job. The heat yesterday was oppressive. With the incessant sun and sprinklers, everything is green and lush. The hedges obscure the patio from the parking lot. They give a sense of privacy from the traffic and even a modicum of tranquility in protecting the garden patio from the asphalt jungle. Apparently, they were too shaggy or tall and needed to be trimmed. The right side was all neat and trimmed while the left was raggedy and tall.

I really don't enjoy yard work. Pulling weeds, cutting grass and other mundane yard work has zero appeal to me. I do confess though, one gets quite a sense of satisfaction from a well-manicured yard. Although no expert, I think that there are two types of gardens, formal and informal, the former being all symmetrical and geometric and the latter being more free form and undulating. Sadly, I think they both require significant maintenance. I do however enjoy a vegetable garden—at least you get to eat the results.

Sometimes our defenses get strong and tall. We hide behind them, hedging our bets, ensuring a path to make a measured retreat if needed. Yet the defenses obscure the outside world. And while safe in our manicured garden, we fail to experience all that life has to offer. Although we can personally enjoy the fruits of our labors, bringing joy to others helps build a sense of fulfillment. Yet, we don't need to trim our hedges to the ground and leave the garden vulnerable. But if we find the right height, we can maintain our sense of self and still enjoy everything the world has to offer.

I kind of hope they don't finish the hedges soon. I like the lopsided look.

No diving

Giggles, splashes and laughs. The kids were having a grand ole time. I saw water guns and heard echoes of Marco Polo. Water toys scattered about. There was a timid, begoggled little kid fearfully clutching the pool edge. Under parents' semi-watchful eyes, it was a great way to beat the sweltering heat. The pool wasn't that shallow, but no more than five feet deep. Nowhere near Olympic-size but definitely had a "big kid" deep-end and a little kid spot by the stairs.

But they were ignoring all of the signs: no running and, of course, no diving. The hotel was naturally concerned about liability. One slip or fall and they could get sued and financially hurt worse than the kids' skinned knees. But with wild abandon, the kids were diving and running anyway. No lifeguard on duty.

We all know we shouldn't dive into things, especially relationships. Although it might seem like the right thing to do, especially when you're hot, you are really taking an unnecessary risk. A headfirst dive may result in serious injury, especially for us amateurs. Perhaps it is best to wade in until we know the pool better. It would be nice to have a love lifeguard.

Not even bronze

Two hundred and five countries and over 10,500 athletes are poised. The opening ceremonies are tonight. They have trained for years, and sometimes their entire life, to compete in their sport. They dream of competition, and of course, gold medals. I talked to a guy that competed in the Olympics once. I understand from him that the atmosphere is electric. Some athletes are intensely focused, trying to keep their heads in the games. Others are seemingly there for the spectacle with no aspirations of winning—kind of like the Jamaican Bob Sled team of a few years back. Regardless they are ready to fly their flags and compete for glory.

And then there are the rest of us. We will be glued to our TV's, vicariously dreaming of winning. We'll collectively gasp at all of the split-second finishes and feel pride in our country's wins. I am sure there will be heart-rending moments of defeat as well. Who can forget that Olympic Marathoner, Joan Benoit, who struggled on with sheer determination to just finish the race? I still recall the old Wide World of Sports intro with the agony of defeat.

Many of us continually compete to be the best. We reach deep inside the lands of "woulda, coulda, shoulda" and "what if" to somehow create expectations of gold medals in our jobs, our relationships and everything else. We all know at least a few of these over-achievers who feel they must win at everything. Most of the time it's just kind of annoying. I remember this guy that was relishing his checkers victory over a kindergartner.

At the end though, although there will be many winners—there will be about 2,100 medals awarded—about 20%. The rest will go home empty-handed. Their dreams dashed and expectations left unfulfilled. Tears and disappointment.

Perhaps we need to reset our goals. Of course we all should reach to be the best, but on a personal basis. We should continue to try to be "our" best rather than "the" best. We can all achieve that. Winning on a personal basis will surely bring more happiness than a simple piece of medal or a fleeting moment of glory. And this, we can all win at.

Passed

Ok, I did it again. Several times actually. Totally zoned out, listening to Car Talk on NPR, I zoomed right by my exit. I know I am ADHD but really, twice in one day and several times this week? I had turned down the GPS on my way to Monticello since there were several long stretches. I am sure she who must be obeyed announced the exit in a timely manner, but at a whisper, and it never registered.

But really I don't think I was even listening to the program either. I was lost in the land of "what if," it seems I never miss that thought exit. Or I could have been in some other not here and now world. My passport has multiple stamps from all of them.

But what's past is passed. I can either listen to the "Recalculating" and move forward or turn around. Sometimes the future route that it calculates is pretty crazy. But turning around on the interstate at 70mph is pretty crazy too.

The problem with the past is that it keeps on coming. Even as I type this, moments and minutes fly by. Choices and decisions are always whispering. And recalculating gets you back into the land of "woulda, coulda, shoulda." If you try to circle back, sometimes the dangers of the road and heart are just too great. Best to take the new path to get to where you want to go. Who knows, maybe it will take you someplace that you want or need to be that wasn't even on the route.

I ended up ignoring her for a bit, much to her annoyance. Turns out there was another exit up ahead that went to a different entrance. Good choice, until the next time I zone out.

Intertwined

It poked me. It was a sharp edge sticking out of the chair I was sitting on. Wicker chairs tend to do that. A fiber breaks from too much squirming. Of course it wasn't a "tragic, I'm bleeding" kind of poke. Just a little reminder. I just shifted my weight to sit differently.

You often see these chairs in antique stores or flea markets. Sometimes there are just a few strands busted. The collectors will tell you to leave them in their original condition as they hold their value. Many ocean towns have these decorating their porches. I understand that sometimes they can be easily repaired. Usually the ones I see are in such a state of disrepair that they desperately need work. I suspect if someone had taken just a little bit of care, they would still be fine. An entirely rewoven chair may be pretty but antique wicker is pretty valuable.

Our lives are made up of many different strands. Each woven together to form our character. Although each one is important, no individual strand will cause the fabric to fail. Our friends, families, and experiences are closely woven to shape what supports us. Even though sometimes one area will break, there are many others there to support your weight. Just a little shift is all it takes. We don't need major character work because we are "crazy," just someone to help us avoid the sharp spots. Of course, if things begin to unravel too fast, it is OK to ask for some help.

Your life lessons are valuable. It's what makes us who we are. Even if there are a few broken strands, if you take some care to mend the pokey bits, the weave will be fine and become more valuable over time.

Captured breaths

The world, and our worlds, are full of problems and challenges. With every breath we take, we inhale some that affect us. We are like an empty balloon, filling each day with struggles that inflate, creating tension. Some are but small puffs or minor annoyances while others are tragic, filling our balloons to near bursting. Some people's balloons are small and can't hold much with a quick temper. Others seem to be able to expand beyond capacity. But regardless, we must inflate daily, for an unfilled balloon is just listlessly waiting to achieve its potential.

To remain aloft, we must figure out ways to let some, but not all, of the air out of our balloons. A little squeaky or a big whoosh when we are too full. Many of us keep inflating and forget to let it out. We stress and strain, always adding a little more, until we are ready to explode. A popped balloon, although it makes a hellava bang, doesn't do anyone any good.

Of course, there are some better ways to let air out. Untying and holding on carefully allows just the right amount to escape. If we totally let loose, we will fly around out of control and eventually collapse unloved again.

If we are able to maintain that balance between stress and relaxation, we can bounce happily around. And if we avoid the sharp objects, we can float almost indefinitely. But a single prick on an overly tense day may result in an unwanted explosion. But if you keep your balloon underinflated, the elasticity may be enough to absorb the poke.

Love is the helium that makes achieve great heights. As we inflate and deflate remember that you are loved, even on your worse day. Your family, friends and that higher power want us to soar.

6-legged lessons

In the silence, I heard a faint tap, tap, tap. I checked the door—no one was there. It has been raining all day. One of those soaking rains that varied from "run for cover" to "is it still raining?" kind of days. Puzzled, I went to the window. There was a big dragonfly poking at the window from under the eaves. Tap, tap, tap he tried again to futilely get in. Although clear to him, obviously the window was a successful barrier. A beautiful butterfly took shelter on the sill. For a moment she paused and then off again as if the tapping bothered her too. She fluttered away to find something more peaceful, I guess. Glancing down, there was a small black crawly thing that must have found a crack and was exploring on my side. Must be the same way the mosquito got in that bit my butt the other day.

Sometimes we beat our heads into the wall, trying to solve problems. Try as we might, the process is occasionally futile. As a therapist, I recognize that our defensive structures, like rationalization and projection, are designed to protect our inner core from assault. Although it appears to be clear, the challenges are sometimes well defended. We could flutter away and ignore them, but that doesn't remove the barrier. But the little crawly bug found a solution. He may not have been as majestic or pretty as the other two, but careful exploration helped him to solve the problem.

It's good to occasionally step back from our challenges and reassess. Flying away, although elegant, won't solve anything. But persistence, even if it is a bit ugly, may eventually lead to a solution.

What did you say?

She said, "He just doesn't get me—he doesn't listen." He rolls his eyes, so at least he hears something. Of course, the immediate response is denial and counter-accusation. Seems that gets heard too. They are comments that I have heard hundreds of times from spouses, parents, and kids. Everyone wants to talk and no one wants to listen. Perhaps more accurately, we listen and do not hear.

Although hearing is innate, listening is not. We listen for what we want to hear, quickly filling in the blanks to confirm what it is we are expecting to hear. Most times though, that may not be what the speaker meant. And then there is the self-talk that we don't hear. We look for resonance or dissonance to what we think we should be thinking, not what we are thinking.

Of course we can't act upon all of our words or thoughts. Every action or word should not have an equal or opposite reaction. Many need to be interpreted in context. But words, like us, are not always precise. If you carefully contemplated your every response, you might do a better job but who does that?

Listening, hearing and understanding are the keys. Not what you want to understand, but the idea, concept or emotion that is being expressed. Take time to explore it with your head and your heart, not just one or the other.

Effective communication requires at least 50% listening.

Do you hear me?

Reclaimed

They were scattered about like crumbs from day-old bread. Red and brown, they were haphazardly strewn about in small piles overgrown with weeds. Most weren't broken and a few pairs remained stuck together defying what must have either been a substantial impact or just old age. In the higher weeds, there were outlines and remnants of an old foundation. Still, it was hard to tell if they were from a mere wall or some mighty structure that had collapsed. Whatever it may have been, the bricks seemed to have lost their purpose. Yet most remained strong, waiting to be reclaimed.

Sometimes our world seems to collapse. We feel devastated from some life event that impacted us. Whether it is catastrophic, as in a death or divorce, or a mere quake of emotions, we find ourselves scattered about without a sense of purpose. But our character remains resilient from our life's kiln firing. We may not be what we were; but we still have the potential to be something new.

Our bricks remain strong, in spite of our challenges. The foundation is there, if we can peer through the weeds. Our potential is still there awaiting our actions. But nothing will happen if you lay in a forlorn pile.

Envision a future based on your strengths and you will become mighty again.

Enlighten

Dreary. It's the only way to describe it. Echoes of raindrops reach through the dark, their variable pitch recalling lost thoughts. Reflecting from the puddles of dark asphalt splashes they murmur imageless voices in the gray dawn. Windy torrent tortures the trees, angrily arching with rage. Leaves clinging in the darkness, reflecting rippled twinkles from their exposed underbelly. Yet there is sameness in the storm, comforting in its relaxing sounds.

Flash! The sky is torn with lightening eerily strobing the gloom. Things freeze and disappear, momentarily coming into focus and then lost again to the darkness. Lights dance across the sky as if choreographed to the inundations of storm. In the distance a rumble grows, a train speeding down the track. The sky is cracked with an explosion of thunder, stopping my heart and thoughts. Repeated echoes fade to scream back in another flash.

Some days are dark and full of foreboding. Things seem lost in the dreary darkness. We get lost in our heads, lulled by a storm's tranquility. Promises and plans forgotten as the storm settles over our thoughts. But with each flash of lightening paths become clear, applauded by thunderous ovations. Vision from darkness; fleeting choices are silhouetted in the storm.

Rain is rebirth for the parched and forlorn. Without it we cannot even exist. Although scary and paralyzing, the storm will pass. But insights will remain if you stay focused on the new day's dawn.

Duct

In a flicker, the room darkened. Uh-oh... and then flickered back. *Whew*, I thought, being in a hotel in a power failure wouldn't be good. And as if on cue, the lights went out and stayed out. Frozen in place I waited to see if they would flicker back on. Nope, still dimness settled in. No matter, the sun was up and I could see fine. I went off to shower in the dim, confident I knew how to do that. Shaving was a bit tricky though. But instantly, the room began to get hot. Warm air was blowing out of the duct work. The emergency heat must have kicked on. It's only 80 out, so of course we had to get to that 100 degree southern temperature somehow. The thermostat remained powered and I tried pushing it down to 60, thinking, well maybe.... Nope, just kept blowing hot. No matter, I had an appointment and walked away confident that it will be fixed later.

And it was... when I got back several hours later it was almost snowing in my well-lit room. The windows were near frost from the moisture. I jumped at the thermostat and put it back to 70, pulling on a zip-up hoodie to wait for the warmth again. The hoodie sure helped as I bustled around shutting off lights. Freeze or fry I thought, right? Slowly the room began to warm and it eventually got back to normal.

Sometimes the unexpected happens and darkness envelops you. And although you think you can function well, it just isn't so easy. Things just get hot and you need to vent. The heat builds and you have to walk away before it gets too hot and people have to duck. Of course you can overcompensate and lose your boundaries as you try and make sense of things. Although it may seem that being cold and distant may help, it's just as challenging as being too hot.

The trick is to find your own normal again. It takes some time and effort to control your thermostat. Sometimes too hot and you need to escape, and sometimes too cold and you need to practice self-care. But as long as you take action, things will change.

Small holes

It looked perfect—*what a find*, I thought. It was stainless steel, just like I wanted. And heck, it was only two bucks. Another thrift store victory. I anxiously paid for my treasure and was just happy that I had found what I wanted without suffering full price. One of the best parts of bargain hunting is finding exactly what you want when you want it. I am sure it wasn't there yesterday but I wasn't really looking for one yesterday. But given how poorly I have been sleeping, I decided that I need to have more coffee in the morning to keep myself going. A travel mug was just the ticket to grab some coffee at the hotel. I filled it to the brim and took off for the day's adventures.

When I settled in a work I took a nice long sip of that just perfect coffee. There was a little drip down the side and I thought, gee, only I could dribble out of a sealed cup. I dried it off and went back to work. A few moments later, I took another sip and noticed my hand was wet again. Must have missed that drip, another tissue sacrificed and it was perfect again. With the next sip, I peeked and didn't see anything wrong and promptly forgot it. I finished the coffee and went out.

Damn, the next day it happened all over again. I carefully inspected my failing bargain and discovered a small hole in the plastic, just below the rim. Barely perceivable, right at the very edge. No way I could have seen it. Irritating—so much for my perfect bargain. But if I held it just right, didn't screw it down too tight or fill it to the top it, it would be fine.

Sometimes we think we are perfect, and things need to be that way too. Until we get too full of challenges. We become edgy and irritable. Our

thoughts and emotions just leak out, just a little. Not enough to be disastrous but enough that we need to be a bit more careful. Even if we need a little tissue now and then, we can still be successful.

With a different twist, making sure we're not too full of hot stuff, and we can move through our day's just fine. None of us are perfect. If we can discover our minor flaws, we can easily learn to cope. The secret is in keeping our cup just a little empty.

Shards

I was trying to be careful. But I was moving a little too fast trying to get done. It was just an accident. Moving things around, trying to clean up the dust, and over it went. Ten feet down the steps and hundreds of pieces. It was kind of an expensive frame, more than just a few bucks. It took a while to find just the right one, there are so many to choose from. And now, it was just a mess. It wasn't just cracked, it was devastated. How could one piece of glass break into so many pieces? But the picture was fine, not a mark on it. I smooshed the frame together and put it back on the shelf for now.

But now, I had a mess. Careful not to grab too hard, I slowly picked up the pieces. There were lots of sharp and dangerous shards, anxious to cut. The big pieces were easy, it's the little slivers that were the biggest challenge. They reflected back, little sparkles in the light. But one by one, I thought I got them all. Even though I vacuumed, I still found a few more small pieces. I'll have to be careful in my bare feet.

What once we looked at to protect us, sometimes shatter unexpectedly. In spite of our investment and care, sometimes things just break. A million sparkly memories and pieces are scattered about. The big stuff tends to fall back into place pretty easily with a little care. There is nothing wrong with the big picture. We pick up our lives, mostly intact, and look for new frames to protect us. Yet some slivers remain that still can hurt if we're not careful. Especially when your emotions are a bit bare.

But we can find new relationships. There are lots more frames out there, and some that will make the big picture look at least as good, if not better.

Always getting better

I take toll of the mornings ailments. The back still hurts, but that's perpetual now. There is a new scratch on my leg, something bit me yesterday. My stomach is funky, not really in pain but something ails it, probably not eating right. I slept funny on my arm and that aches. The foot is a fading purple where I crunched into the chair, not a big deal anymore but it hurt like hell for a few days. My head is a bit achy from not enough sleep. My chest is congested from cigars and humidity: Nothing major, just a list of things to treat. But they really aren't a treat. Treats are fun—these not so much. *It sucks getting old*, I think. There are always things that ache.

Of course there are other aches. Loss, middle of the night loneliness, and relationships that didn't work. Lots of woulda coulda shouldas on the mind's treadmill. I try not to focus on them either but they nag as well. Seems I am always healing from some new confidence-shaking something. Real or perceived, something always seems to ache.

Yesterday, as a young soldier was recounting his war horrors, I think of his aches. After a yearlong deployment, he shares haunting torments of firefights, body bags and the close range shooting of a child soldier. His unit losses were as heavy as the burdens he bears. I ingest some of his pain as we walk together.

My prayers this morning are for perspective. I pray for the power of healing for the soldier and others that suffer. I pray for hope and the skills to say the right things to help them heal. My needs are trivial in comparison to most of the people I see. My aches of this morning will fade with time, and a few Advil. The power of prayer will surely help the rest. Of that I am sure.

No matter what the challenge, we are always getting better.

Next too

It really doesn't make any sense, but some things never do. They were identical when they started; I know, I saw them. But one is huge now and the other one not so much. From where I sit every morning they appear to have been exposed to the exact same things; but why was one so different? One was tall, full but a bit gangly. The other, kind of puny. They both got the same amount of sun and other elements. They faded equally in the heat and both perked up in the rain. But still, one impatiens was just a fraction of the size of the other one.

If you think about it, many of us have similar experiences but come out vastly different. Many of us were raised by families with similar values. Hard work, honesty, integrity, caring and many, many other things in common. We are more alike than different. But we are different. Our life experiences affect us in different ways. What some perceive as a debilitating problem others find as a challenge to complete.

Although the gardeners of life may look at one as not successful, I disagree. In fact, the petite seems to be more well-rounded and perfect. Although the flamboyant one is magnificent, it may not survive long into the fall. The ginormous one needs way more water and sun to maintain its appearance while the diminutive one will still thrive on very little.

Sometimes we evaluate our success in life by our outward appearances. We think that success is based on more, better, bigger. But really success is best defined by character. If you are the best you can be, in spite of your challenges, you are much stronger than others may think. With just a little love, we can thrive. Sometimes the little things make the biggest difference.

But both can bring joy and beauty to all who gaze upon them.

Barriers

Cold, black, and jagged, they aspire to protect the shore from the waters torment. The ceaseless crashing, trying to steal the ground beneath your feet. They glisten and glare in the dim light, reflecting sparkles of valuable minerals within. Jagged edges proudly facing, yet some worn smooth to the touch. A barrier to the torment, haphazardly strewn by some unimaginable force. The leading edge takes most of the force but that changes with the tides. The crevices are filled with flotsam and jetsam trickled in from sea. There were other boulders scattered on the shore, as if dropped on the way to the sea. They rest, dusty and forlorn, awaiting their turn to serve. Together they formed an immovable fortification.

Each day we are faced with the ceaseless challenges that try and erode us away. No matter where the tide is, we reach for something to protect us from the torment. We build fortifications with our foundations of faith, love and character. But our foundations can also be a barrier to experiencing life. The forlorn rocks can be cold and purposeless if they serve as an excuse for not meeting challenges. If we allow the sands of the day to fill in the cracks, the wall will become stronger and ready to face the storms.

Life is at the surf's edge.

No labels

Really, who in their right mind would do that? I can't even imagine it. But I suppose in this litigious society we live in, someone might. Actually someone may have, which is what prompted it. I had bought a new spiffy bike a few months back with the intention of riding back into shape. It still is in the bike rack, waiting. But of course, I had to buy a lock so it wouldn't get stolen. On the lock package was a stern warning, not for human consumption. Really? Does a lock even look remotely edible? My coffee cup has the now ubiquitous warning, "Caution, contents may be hot." Well they damn well better be, I want hot coffee. I am sure you have all seen dozens of other similar warnings.

One of the ways we learn is though experience. Trial and error, even when we might have the right answer. Life doesn't come with silly warning labels although it would be nice if it did. "Warning, bad relationship ahead," or "Danger, pain approaching." Although life's lessons are hard, they are part of what makes us who we are.

More than loose change

If it was being delivered by regular mail, it would have had arrived book rate. It was massive! Did I really spend that much? There must be some mistake. I quickly scan and see a couple of big things I recognize, but what are all these other amounts? Not quite nickels and dimes, but they do add up to dollars and cents. Amazing... ten dollars here, twenty dollars there. And gas... there are a million of them. The little things are way more than the big things. The monthly Visa bill is more breathtaking than any photo I have taken—it certainly leaves me speechless.

This month was nearly 1k more than I expected. Lots of stuff that I forgot but obviously needed. I put everything on my credit card so it shouldn't be a big surprise when the bill shows up, but it always is. But in thirty some odd years, I have never carried any debt. I just use it for convenience. There is always a bittersweet sigh when it's paid though. And I love the luscious points I earn. Seems there is always something I can get with them.

We accumulate lots of debt every day, even though we might not know it. We owe our friends, colleagues and even strangers that extend a hand, a smile, or just a courtesy that makes our days easier. Of course, there are many that we owe for bigger things too. Our parents, teachers, mentors have all helped shape us to be who we are. Of course, don't forget the grace we are bestowed from God. If you reflect, there are more than a few that we are indebted to. And even though they may never ask to be paid, it is important to pay your debt on time. Even one more day tardy is too many.

Scan your world for those you owe and make sure they know they are valued. Whether on bended knee or a hand extended, let these creditors know that you are grateful. A smile, a call or even a quick note keeps that bill in a more manageable size. Even though it may not change the world, it will change their world. You'll be glad you did.

Tangled

There must be gnomes that live in that drawer. I swear, each time I place something in there, I am very careful. I make careful, matching loops and smooth them out. I use twister ties, rubber bands and Velcro straps. But every time I try and take something out, it's spaghetti. A big ball of tangled wires, adapters and plugs. I know there are ones I no longer need, but someday I might. I carefully study the octopus, trying to determine if the one I need is in there. I rotate and ponder, examining each wire to see if it's right. I confess that on occasion I have just bought a new one 'cause I didn't want to deal with the mess. Ah, there it is! I carefully begin the surgical extraction. Under there, through that... no that didn't work. Try another way. I give it a good shake, that seems to help. Back at it and... Victory, I got it! I briefly ponder untangling the rest and toss it back into gnomeland for another day.

Things get tangled up, when we least expect it. Even though we take care to try and keep things neat, somehow they get messed up. Emotions are just like that. Although we value the pure and simple, they never seem to be. Your heart gets all tangled up with things you don't need. When we look close, we can sometimes see the solution. Although it may be easier to try a new one, the old things are still tangled up in your head. At some point, we have sort through it. It takes patience and care to get to it. Although you may not be able to figure it all out, with a bit of attention, you can get what you need. The rest can wait.

Scissors can work too.

Blooms

They were fading fast and really, there was nothing that could be done. I am sure they were absolutely breathtaking a few days ago. A moment in time of expressed love. Full of glory, romance and surprise. I can imagine her surprise receiving them. Heart full of joy, smiles bigger than the blooms. The envy of all to see. I have often watched flower delivery men walk through an office with all eyes on them, waiting to see where they would stop. Who is loved today? I can imagine several hearts racing in anticipation that they might be for them. Sadly, only one will be so lucky.

Sending love is just as rewarding. Countless little children rush to their moms clutching handfuls of dandelions. All smiles, expressing their love and anxious for its return. I have too waited for the call from those I love to tell me their joy in their gifts. Anticipation of their smiles and thoughts, waiting to warm their hearts.

But now, they sat forlorn on the desk merely recalling their former beauty. In a few shorts days they fade to but a shadow of themselves. Droopy and browning they await their sure fate. Loves lost but not forgotten.

Of course, if they had roots, they would continue to thrive. Sprinkles of love, a little light and attention and they might last forever.

Love is like that. Sometimes full of bursts of fulfilling glory where everything is just perfect. Anticipation, warm thoughts and imagined kisses. But for love to last it needs to be more than a moment. It needs care, attention and roots. It may not be glorious all of the time, but with time it will continue to flourish in its beauty.

Said so

She was bright and articulate. Just trying to figure out the world around her. She keep asking and asking. Very patient at first, the mom just kept giving it all she had. But no matter what the answer was, there was a follow-up. Finally, out of exasperation, mom gave up and said, "Because I said so!" It's never worked in the history of parenting.

Frustrated parents with inquisitive kids are always getting pushed beyond their patience. Try as they might to deal with all of the questions, they just run out of answers. We are always asked to believe things just because. Powerful orators or authors paint pictures of their reality, asking us to suspend belief and just accept things. The media seems to be constantly spinning something or other from a talking head. Depending on our favorite source, we tend to believe them, just because. Of course, since there are so many spins, it's hard to tell what is true and what people want us to believe is true.

Some truths are absolute. Science and technology always seem to point to an exact answer. Why is the sky blue does have an answer, no fact-checking required. But there are many things that philosophers and poets have struggled with for thousands of years that just hang out there. And even when there are elements of personal truth, there are things that require us to suspend belief and just accept.

Prayer is one of those things. We learn from the teachings of our spiritual guides in the Bible, Koran, or the Torah. And although they offer guidance, aside from the commandments, there are no absolutes. Prayer helps sort out our personal truths and provides answers. And sometimes miracles do come true.

Miracles may not answer why the sky is blue but may help us see the beauty all around us.

Don't go hungry

It was more the time of the day than that empty feeling. If I didn't go now, I am sure I won't even go. Not that I have that much to do but some days you just don't feel like going out when you get home. Of course, I could just go across the street and get something, but then I'd have the same problem tomorrow. A quick look, I didn't even have ketchup: time to get to the store.

Instantly my nose was assaulted. The grocery store was one of those high end ones with a zillion prepared meals to grab and go. Lots of choices as I fondled and savored the possibilities. I could almost taste a few right through the package. But usually these things look better than they taste. Some require nuking and others are simply open and devour. As I wandered through the aisles, my stomach began to say, "pick something already."

Choices are difficult, especially when you're hungry. Of course I could fill my buggy with many of the look good things and they would fill the frig. But of course, most of them aren't very good for you. Patience has never been a strong suit for me and like Pavlov's dog, my mouth begins to water. It would fill the hole but, and like Pavlov's dog, it really wouldn't be the meat he craved. More of the anticipation of things to come than the reality of having them.

Often we are presented with many choices, many of which seem exceptional. Although you may briefly savor them, at the end of the day some of them are just not good for you. Although the temptation might be instantly gratifying, fulfillment comes from something deeper. If you take the time to prepare with introspection and prayer, you will never go hungry.

Low spots

It was a fast-moving storm. Although it was forecast and inevitable this time of year, it was still unexpected. The temperature changed quickly and the clouds opened up to a torrent of rain. From pale gray overcast to pitch black in moments. Sheets washed the streets, cleansing the heat of the day. Thunder rumbled ominously. It seemed to settle in for a quenching storm. And just as fast, the blue re-emerged a stillness settled. The rivers stream away, leaving spotty puddles in their stay, reflecting back from the warming sun. The silence is pierced by the chirp of a jay calling to the sun, seeming grateful to have survived once again.

None of our worlds are perfect, we know this. Yet it seems sometimes that we are not expecting storms. They come at us fast and drench our thoughts with dark forebode. Tears fall like rain drenching our cheeks and it seems we may never be happy again. From the rivers of sadness, puddles remain in the low spots, waiting to be chased away by the Son.

Things are never smooth, of that the forecast is always correct. None of us emerge without tears. Most of the sadness will stream away leaving just small puddles. But each will reflect back in the Son with answers that will slowly emerge. They may not evaporate as fast as they came but will eventually have that happy chirp once again.

Chasms

She was more perfect than even her highly organized work area. Or at least she thought so. Perfect outfit, impeccable nails and hairdo. Everything has, and is, in its place. It looked like that's what made her happy in her intense world. She didn't look like my type so I never had reason to engage. I was afraid I'd lose a few fingers. But today I thought she looked just a little out of sorts and I thought maybe she was having a non-perfect day. What the heck, made a passing innocuous comment. Well, my crystal ball proved right and I got a look over the glasses that would pop corn. She made some sort of caustic remark that was dripping with sarcasm. Nice, I'll never learn. I walked away in awkward silence.

I constantly find myself caring too much for people that care too little. I listen with all of my senses and try to bring a moment of joy or happiness to someone's day, even if they are a stranger. I should care less but really, it's not my style. I like making people think and smile. I think love stops at the same time caring does. And if anything, I love too much.

Sarcasm builds chasms in relationships. At its core, it is meant to belittle or offend. Some people think it's funny but usually it is hurtful to someone. They confuse it with wit and humor. Some of these people who think it's funny, say they don't have a filter, as if that absolves them of responsibility. Even if they aren't, they present as uncaring. I guess that's how they protect their fragility.

Care free is not a synonym for careless. Perception can be reality. Creating gaps between yourself and others creates chasms in your world. It's okay to be different and value that, but not at the expense of others. The quickest way to happiness is to stop looking for it inside and start living it on the outside.

Piggy bank lessons

It's that time of the month again. Lots of people want my money. Not sure there will be any left for the savings account again. Last month I did manage to save something, it felt pretty good. It's always the goal. Someday it might be rainy and I'll need it.

It seems we spend lots of time trying to save. Save for our retirement, for the kids or that dream vacation. We look for sales, coupons and all sorts of things to try to keep more of what we earn in our pockets. We admire the sharp consumer who always knows the best places to shop. We're proud of our accomplishments when we watch our grocery bill drop by a few bucks. We get mad when we overspend on something too. It irks us when we see the same thing somewhere else for less. We hate to waste money.

In spite of our efforts, one thing we can't save is time. Of course we can find a better way or some shortcut, but in the end, time keeps moving forward. We may end up with a few moments to spend on something else, but there is no way to save it for a rainy day.

Perhaps we should think more about investing. If we invest and spend our time with someone or something worthwhile, that will surely pay dividends on a rainy day. Not a moment is ever wasted on kindness or caring. It may not pay the rent, but I'll take love over money anytime.

No piggy bank required.

Here's to 7

Well it's been both long and short, sometimes at the same time. It seems like I have been here forever but really, it wasn't even close. When I started, it seemed like forever and there were days and minutes that seemed that way too. The heat was blistering for much of the time, and we had rains that would give Noah pause. It was definitely busy. On a daily basis, the time moved quickly but the calendar seemed to crawl. It was a whole season—the entire summer. Looking back over my shoulder though, it really wasn't that long. In fact, it was only .47 % of the 19,006 days I have been around.

When you look back at your memorable days, for most of us they are just a fragment. If you add up all of the births, deaths, marriages and other life events maybe you get to .75 %. Even if you add in all of the other terrific days and moments that come to mind, you probably still can't even get to whole numbers.

With each ending there is a new beginning. Although sometimes I look for an end to beginnings, that just isn't the way life is. Although the rocking chair on the porch has an appeal, where is the adventure in that?

Here's looking forward to 19,007!

Just one

It was still glorious in its summer do. Rich and lush, it seemed just perfect. Rippling in the cool breeze, you could still imagine the summer sun nourishing its green crown. It was mighty, shading the sidewalk and offering relief to those that sought its comfort. The ground was littered with acorns fallen like rain. A winter's store for the frolicking squirrels. At first, it just seemed surreal. It must be tickling light from some stolen source. "Look at me," it beckoned, a single leaf taunting the rest of the foliage. There was no mistaking that it was just different. A brilliant, indignant red radiance silhouetted in stark contrast to the green.

It's hard to imagine the glow of autumn in the glare of the summer. But change is inevitable. Life's challenges may seem to flaw our grandeur but they lead to the richness that illuminates the seasons of our lives. Things happen in our world for a reason. Although we can do our best to bring about the change we want to be, things happen in their own time. If we trust in ourselves and the wisdom of the creator, things will change for the better. What might seem like a mere distraction can harken the change of the fall. It only takes one to highlight the change.

Be the person that you want to be even if you're different. The rest may not notice you yet, but your inner beauty will lead the way for a better world for you and those around you.

Intermittent

It still wasn't working. I had called more than a year ago and apparently, they still haven't gotten around to it. Kind of strange, I thought the city would have been more on top of things. It is a busy crosswalk with people going back in forth in the pedestrian-friendly area right by my place. Lot of confused people usually, trying to find their way downtown or crawl back in the wee hours. But as I looked out, the street light was still dark. Not that the path was pitch black, there are other lights nearby. But with folks walking around it is a bit dangerous.

But then last night it was working. It illuminated the entire area and it was much safer for people. Is it possible that they just happened to fix it exactly as I got home? I smiled and thought, it was a welcome home present. But as I stared in amazement, it went out. Poof. Dark again. Now I get it, it was only working when it felt like it. It must have a short.

Sometimes we feel lost as we wander on our path. Although we kind of know the way, it is dimly lit. We fumble around, hoping not to stumble. And then… an idea! A plan or path that makes sense. Things may just work out. Optimism lights the way. But other times, the idea looks better only in the middle of the night. It fizzles and pops back into darkness. If it was right, it would stay lit.

Things are not always as bright as they appear. The middle of the night ideas may not be so bright in the light of the day. Although it may be enough to help us find our way momentarily, we need to find that steady light to be safe. The love of our family, friends and God will provide that everlasting vision to help us through even the darkest times.

Maybe I won't call the city again. I can find my illumination elsewhere.

Just gusts

They were awkward hopping around. Well not really hopping but not walking either. A sea of white and beige, just meandering around, apparently aimlessly. As I moved, they quickly moved in sync, maintaining an invisible buffer between us. They didn't really look nervous but it was just instinctive, perhaps timid. They didn't know what to expect and I could be a danger. As I walked further, they began to move faster and purposefully. Eventually one, and then the rest, took to flight. It must have been a bit hard to get airborne, the wind was strong with occasionally head-turning gusts. Maybe it was my imagination but it seemed they had to have to flap extra hard. But once airborne, they gained altitude and were able to soar above the turbulent sea. It is here where they were able to excel. All of the awkwardness gone as they danced gracefully in the sky.

Sometimes life's challenges ground us. We are a bit awkward and timid as we meander around, not sure of the dangers that might be imagined. Seemingly aimless, we look for answers and purpose. In the face of the wind and pending storm, we scurry and avoid, trying to maintain our footing. It seems the safe thing to so. But when we meet our challenges head on, even though it might be a bit harder than we like, we can get airborne again. It is only through a bit of hard work that we can soar again.

Maybe like Jonathan, we can soar to new heights. We just have to work a little harder and get over our fears.

Therefore I am

I was standing right at the counter but couldn't prove it. You would think that since I was right there, that would be enough. In other states it isn't a big deal. You just write your check and you're done with it. But in New Hampshire you need to prove that you actually live there. So in spite of having a fistful of ID and being physically there, I didn't exist. It seems that you need a utility bill. Being the electronic guy that I am, I don't think I have ever seen a utility bill. Just click and it gets paid. Same thing with the cable bill. The clerk said there really isn't an alternative. I guess it's designed to stop tax evaders but what about us honest folk? How the heck do you register the car then? How frustrating!

Descartes struggled with this same dilemma, albeit it in a much different context. The quintessential argument is how to prove to yourself that you do exist. He ended up settling on the famous insight that if you think, you must exist. Pretty basic function. But just existing by thinking is really not much of an existence. We all think about lots of stuff, yet many of our thoughts don't become actions. I suppose it's a good thing for some of the dark ones we have. But for the rest, it is really what makes us human. Although the thought does count, it's putting your thoughts into action that makes a difference. Love unexpressed is at best unrequited. At worst, it just leads to emptiness.

Put into actions your better thoughts or ideas. It is what brings richness to your world. Who cares what others think, being true to yourself is the way to fulfillment. I do, therefore I am.

I ended up getting the utility company to fax the clerk a bill. It worked. You fax, therefore I am.

$1.99

I really, really wanted one. Or at least I thought I did. My life was so chaotic that I was convinced that this was just what I needed. I had bought a few different ones but this one was just out of the reach of what I wanted to spend. At $199.00, it was pretty expensive. I ended up buying a different, cheaper model that did the job. But here was one, glistening on the thrift store shelf. I couldn't believe it! I just had to have it. All of the longing flashed back and the decimal place had moved two places to the right! At $1.99 for a Palm Pilot, how could you go wrong? I bought the cherished Palm and spent a few hours playing with it. Really though, it has pretty primitive use in today's world.

It seems like just a few months ago I was scouring to find the thing I wanted. If I only had it, life would be easier. There was always something that I was on a quest for. Some new gadget, a new job or some convenience that would make things easier. Now, most of them seem like they existed in a different lifetime.

If you think back on all of the things that you have wanted in the past, how many of them do you still need or want today? We long for fulfillment of our immediate wishes and desires, thinking that they will solve our problems. Of course, some of them might make our life easier for a moment, but at the end of the day there are always more wishes. Many of yesterday's wants belong in yesterday.

Life fulfillment comes from a different place. You can't buy it at Best Buy or Wal-Mart. Happiness is a state of mind that comes from our eternal quest to be a better person. To live a life that is worthy of something higher, more fulfilling, and maybe even everlasting.

Representin'

The email was insistent. Usually, I don't even open them. But for some reason I clicked on it—*another win for the spammers*, I thought. It was simple, it said. If only I created a logo for my business I'd get lots more customers. Something that captures the essence, the spirit of what I do, the customers would flood in. Only a few steps, and they would make it easy. How could you go wrong with such a small investment in your success?

We seem to always be looking to align ourselves with something. Wearing something on our clothes so everyone can see with a glance. We wear our favorite sports team's logos to say we are fans. Many look for those major designer logos to tell the world that they are living the Ralph Lauren or Nike lifestyle. Many are strategically positioned right over our hearts to show how much we love them. Of course, many people even have role confusion as they have multiple logos at all times, from their Coach purses to the Mercedes they drive. Trying to say something to the world about what they are all about.

What would your personal logo say about you? If you created a logo that showed what we were really all about, what would it be? Perhaps something with your profession, like an apple for a teacher? Or maybe a cash symbol if you're in finance? How about a more personal representation like a mom or dad? Maybe it would be a Bible or a WWJD symbol. Many of us might wear a heart over our heart, just in case someone forgot what was inside.

Belonging is one of those core things that we all want. We want to be loved and cared about. Yet sometimes we represent others things that might not be part of what matters. We get lost in the superficial, just trying to belong. But really, it's what's under the logo that counts.

Small repairs

It was barely noticeable, you could hardly see it. But it was almost new and it annoyed me. I am pretty sure it wasn't there when I bought it, but I really didn't inspect it all that well. I had really loved it and sprung more than it was worth just to have it. But now, it had a hole in it. It had been worn and washed so there was no going back to complain about it. I probably did something to it anyway. I could try and mend it but then it would be obvious. I'd probably make it worse. Besides, I don't even think I own a needle and thread, pretty funny since my mom was a seamstress. I'll just wear it and see what happens, I thought. I'll be careful. Sure enough, the hole was bigger at the end of the day. Now it's a little too big to mend but way too good to pitch. Relegated to the back of the drawer in the unloved clothes pile.

Sometimes things we love develop problems. They start out perfect, like a new relationship. If we look close, we might see imperfections. But if we're in love, they really aren't noticeable. But with time, the flaws become apparent. We can ignore them but usually they will get bigger. They might even unravel. It doesn't mean that you love them any less, but it will be a constant concern.

Don't let the little things become big things. Take a few minutes and find where there might be a small hole in your life. A few stitches and things can be whole again.

Probing puddles

It looked like a lake. Well not really, but it was pretty big, considering it hadn't rained much in the past few days. Kind of murky brown, like it was full of mud and such. It had gotten noticeably smaller but still, you just couldn't hop over it. It was still deep too, at least a few inches. With all of the cars that splashed through it, you think it would have splashed dry already. But it remained a safe harbor for nasty little flying things. Having parked there for years, I had never seen it before though. I pondered this as I circumnavigated it. Why now? The answer was apparent when I looked; the storm drain was clogged with debris. It was preventing all of that nasty stuff from flowing away. A quick swipe at the grate, and all of that stuff would flow away.

Often times our thinking gets backed up. Challenges of the day, of our pasts, and unknown future, prevent us from thinking openly. All of that junk just accumulates and interferes with clarity. Although we can splash some of the rubbish out, clear thinking requires us to move it out of the way. Sure, it will accumulate again, but without some action, it will stay clogged and breed nasty stuff. A different perspective, a positive outlook, or some simple problem solving can swipe it clean.

Being the guy that I am, I snatched up a long limb and poked at the drain. The stuff immediately began to drain away. It was a weird sense of accomplishment but it made me smile like an 8 year old.

The big chill

Fall is in the air. The trees are in their full glory as temperatures vary from stolen days of warmth to more than sweatshirt chills. Although winter is still far away, its forebode harkens on the horizon. But for now, we delight in the crisp apple breeze that brings fall's adventures. But the temperature challenges our wardrobes and thermostats. How cool or warm will it be today?

I used to have one of those setback thermostats that adjusted my heat multiple times a day. One temperature for when I got up, one for when I am not there and another for when I am sleeping. Yet, with the unpredictability of fall, it never seemed to get it just right. I was constantly clicking it on and off or fiddling with the dial to adjust it to the right temperature. Sometimes I would get it just right but many times it was too hot or cold.

As we reach the fall of our lives, we struggle with getting it right. Erikson saw this as a dichotomy between Generativity and Stagnation. The need to be able to still create things that will outlast them, to create love in the future or to play it safe, self-absorbed lethargy. The dilemma is how do we remain or become more caring without overextending. How hot or how cold do we want our life challenges to be?

Stagnant water quickly becomes impure and creates rust. Although we may not be sure what the right balance is, it is important to keep changing to meet the new challenges, head on and unafraid. Being a little uncomfortable is part of the change of seasons. But it also requires maintaining a balance within ourselves. Self-care, a spiritual centering, and a sense of joy in our daily lives will lead to fulfillment.

Get out your sweatshirts and T-shirts and be the change you want to see.

Leave room

I rarely go out for coffee but it was such a beautiful morning I thought, what the heck. I am always a bit intimidated by the vast array of choices listed on the menu board. Not only are there three or four choices of regular coffee but 87,000 possible combinations. I listened carefully to others orders, trying to learn how to be cool. The guy in front of me added two shots of espresso to his. I think that's called rocket fuel or something. With a little courage, I meandered through the menu and picked something not quite that exotic, just a regular blend of some sort. The perky barista asked, "Do you want room for cream?" Without even thinking, I agreed. Stuttering is so not cool.

Life presents many choices and challenges. You can easily get lost in the mix, paralyzed by the overwhelming. For each choice, there are multiple variations that all make it just a little different. For each of us, we need to make the choices that make sense. Rocket fuel for the high speed and "regular" for the ordinary. Whatever fills your cup.

But it's important that we always leave a little room for the extra things in our life. Love, passion and prayer are what truly make us full.

Venti please, with room for cream.

Salt and pepper

I spilled it, all over the table. I was doing some rare cleaning and over it went. I think they put something in it to make sure it's free flowing and it sure did. A pool of white crystals all over. Good thing the DEA didn't come in then, they'd think I was manufacturing Meth or something. I took a pinch and tossed it over my left shoulder. Old superstition. In ancient times, salt was rare and it was considered sacrilegious to waste it. Apparently, the devil is supposed to stay on your left shoulder. Tossing a pinch over your shoulder went into his eyes so he couldn't see what you did. But for me, it was just an old mess. Good thing it's cheap.

Many of us fear getting old. We spend our time and money trying to chase the years away by dressing younger, dying our hair or other things to recapture our youth. But for many of us, we wear our gray as a sign of distinction and battle scars. We earned each one of them. Somehow the salt and pepper look is prized among men and middle aged sex symbols. I wonder how bald guys show theirs?

But I, for one, don't really want to relive my youth. Looking back from afar, it may reminisce well but if you think harder, there were some of the same challenges as today. I have been given many gifts for which I am grateful. The path may not have been clear then but looking back, I would not have swapped much of my journey.

Aside from your genetics, your experience is what has made you what you are today. Not much you can do about mistakes or spilled salt. Best to toss some at the devil and move forward. More accomplishments await.

Connected

It was hanging lower, kind of weird. Most times, metal doesn't stretch unless it's heated up. But the chandelier was definitely lower. It's a good thing I noticed it or it would have crashed down and smashed, probably in the middle of dinner. It has an old, semi-rusty chain that I have been meaning to replace, but who thinks of these things. Of course, the wire might have saved the catastrophe but not a good idea to have it swinging on an electric lamp cord. But when I looked at it, really it was only one link that had opened a bit. I must have tripped on the cord and stretched it a bit. A quick pinch and it seemed strong again.

We are all only as strong as our own weakest link. We have areas in our world that are our personal fragile spots. Problem relationships, apologies that need to be expressed, and other nagging things that we might have tripped up on or got a little too hot. We try and ignore them, thinking that we are strong and can overcome our adversities. But when you think about them, they can bring you down.

We have many things that link us together. Life experiences, achievements, families, and friends. Even though our chains may be a little old, we are still in pretty good shape. It's what holds us together and keeps us safe. But when we fail to maintain perspective on our connectedness, we lose sight of each individual link. Our connections don't need to be replaced; they just need a little repair.

Take the time to address your weak spots. With a little attention, we can be even stronger.